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# Levels of Perception in Michael Fillerup's *Visions and Other Stories*

Robert M. Hogge<sup>1</sup>

MICHAEL FILLERUP'S *Visions and Other Stories* is an impressive collection of nine artistically wrought stories, each one presenting Mormon protagonists who struggle to understand their relationship to many of today's perplexing issues: sterility, birth control, adultery, abuse, abandonment, insensitivity, and the limits imposed by time. In each story, the treatment of these issues is substantial, not simplistic; value-centered, not didactic; sensitive, but not overly sentimental. Fillerup is an insider, one who intimately knows the inner workings of the LDS Church, the relative vision or blindness of his characters, and the American Southwest in which most of them live.

But in this collection, Fillerup is doing much more than telling nine separate stories. As in William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Modern Library, 1955), a later story, "Visions," is the thematic center of a carefully organized collection divided into Here (white communities) and There (Navajo reservation) subsections. Dave, the central character in "Visions," has a first name, but no family name. He's a nominal father obsessed by photography, his profession, his focus in life, but his family is carefully shunted off stage. His one link with family is a conscience-soothing phone call he makes to his wife Jenny and his daughter Cassie. Rationalizing his need to stay all night on the job, Dave speaks the right words to them, but the emotion behind the words is sterile. Dave has no valid reason for staying at work except his misguided quest to develop a photograph he has taken of an Indian medicine man. However, Dave is not perceptive enough to realize that the Navajo's supernatural image cannot be developed rationally by the white man's advanced technology: the developer tray, film, and fixer.

At the same time, Dave rejects prayer, the nonrational solution. A surface Mormon always ready to argue his beliefs, he finally listens to Eddie Tom, a Navajo coworker, who shares with him his vision of the living Church:

*The first time it worked for me, it was the morning after a meeting. My wife, she was bringing in the water. There was a light, like a big spotlight on her. The bucket she was holding, it became a tepee. . . . There was a little circle, and then there was a little person. He had brown hair—long brown hair—and blue eyes, and he was wearing a white robe. He came out and put his hand on my wife's head. Then I knew. He blessed her. . . . That was right before we got our son.<sup>2</sup>*

Eddie Tom showed Dave what pure religion is and can be, a family-centered vision, focusing on husband and wife and children. But Dave doesn't see it. He returns to work, reaffirms his rational religion, and rejects the Navajo's vision as undoubtedly peyote-induced—rejects, that is, until later when he experiences his own epiphany, looking out at the newly fallen snow and seeing three Indians in spontaneous worship: "One old man crossed himself. Another dropped to his knees and kissed the snow. A third raised his arms to the frozen sun" 177). Now Dave sees enough to destroy the undeveloped negative, opening himself up to a new way to perceive truth.

In the next two stories, "Ultimatum" and "The Orchard," Fillerup explores diametrically opposed visions of religious truth. "Ultimatum," the puritanical story, is written in a minimalist style reminiscent of Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" (*The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*



[New York: Scribner's, 1938]). Like Hemingway's story, Fillerup's description is suggestive, and is as valuable for what it doesn't say, for the meanings that lie beneath the words.

In the story, Dave Adams and Bob Howells, two white religious leaders of an LDS Navajo congregation, drive to a hogan, exchange small talk with Norman (a member of their congregation), hand him a letter, wait for him to read it and acknowledge its contents, and then begin the drive home, leaving Norman and his family to ponder the letter's message. Though the message is not specifically identified, it constitutes an ultimatum, probably a letter of excommunication from a Church court, charging Norman with fathering a child through incest. Dave Adams, the father of the congregation, is painfully aware of the message and is justly concerned about Norman's possible reaction to it. But the insensitive Bob offers these comforting words: "You've got to say no. Especially out here" (187). Bob articulates the theme of negation—negation of Navajo customs and values—mandating instead a Mosaic enforcement of Church law. The imagery complements the story's harsh theme, suggesting suicide (of an individual) and murder (of a culture). Similar to the way the narrator and Maria in James Joyce's "Clay" use words,<sup>3</sup> Dave's repeated use of "fine," when mentioning his own relationship with his wife, undercuts that relationship, showing how fragile it is. "Ultimatum" ends as it begins, in superficial dialogue.

An effective thematic counterpoint to "Ultimatum" is "The Orchard," a legendary tale of affirmation, consummation, and cultural synthesis. Rich with mythological undertones, "The Orchard" brings together names, images, and words from sacred Navajo legends and Mormon "genesis" myths, a retelling of "the Navajo creation story, of First Man and First Woman, of beginnings and endings and re-beginnings" (207). Mel and Dottie are the two central characters. Mel is a white school teacher of fourth-grade Indian students, well-read in both cultures, a bachelor embittered by women. Through his eyes, we see Dottie Littlesunday, one of his former students, but now a university professor. She invites

him to hike with her into a sacred canyon in Navajoland, a restricted area where only Navajos and "certified" whites may enter. The lush imagery, allusions, and dialogue, however, suggest that the story is more than a hike; it is the Navajo tale of a woman selecting her mate, initiating him to her ways. Mel too sees that their walk suggests larger issues. When Dottie asks him, "Would you like to see my grandmother's hogan?" Mel reflects, "The uncalculated innocence. Like a script from a fairy tale" (205). "The Orchard" is an inter-cultural tale, blending diverse mythologies, synthesizing white and Indian, the antithesis of "Ultimatum."

But the parable in the *There* subsection that most poignantly depicts Fillerup's vision, taking one character from negation to affirmation, is "Hozhoogoo Nanina Doo." In this story, Max Hansen experiences his own Gethsemane as he alone finishes painting the beams on the ceiling of a Church gymnasium, his final act before leaving the reservation. Fasting, almost delirious at times, he reminisces, in a stream-of-consciousness mode, as he paints, trying to make sense out of the key events of his ten-year stay on the reservation: his ambivalent feelings for the Navajo people, his own spiritual vacillation, and his gradual discovery of what the living Church is. In one crucial day, his daughter is killed in a freak accident; he punches a medicine man in the mouth; and he is called as the ecclesiastical leader of the Tsegi Branch. But as he now reflects on his ministry, he feels he has been a failure, at least by outward signs.

He began as one interested in the Navajo people and culture, but gradually became consumed by statistics and standards. He negates, driving the people away from him, causing them to hate him. Then ever so gradually he sees. An Indian woman with breast cancer asks him for a blessing and is healed, even though his overly qualified prayer never stated she would be healed. Another Indian woman is injured and freezing in a desolate area. She prays for help, and two missionaries respond, not Max. A drunken Chester Deswood asks Max to pray for him, but Max, thinking he is being conned, preaches, through prayer, rather than comforts. When he finally realizes Chester's request is genuine, Max feels

ashamed of the worthless prayer he has just offered, experiencing his own epiphany: "I could have done the only thing that makes me worth my salt, out here or anywhere, brought a little comfort to a troubled soul" (154).

Once he has made that discovery, Max moves from negation to affirmation, discovering who the Navajo people really are: people of faith and vision—people who accept and expect miracles. At the end of his ministry when he is giving his final address in Church, Max feels an overwhelming love for the people and speaks the great cliché, knowing it is a cliché, but, nonetheless, feeling genuine emotion: "I just want you to know that I . . . I love each and every one of you" (124). Then the miraculous happens to him. After the meeting, an old Indian woman comes up to him, touches the back of his arm to get his attention, and speaks to him in Navajo, as if he could understand every word. For a minute, Max is interrupted by another person; when he looks back, the Navajo woman has vanished. He can only remember a fragment of what she has told him—*hozhoogoo nanina doo*—an expression a friend later translates for him: "May you go in beauty, harmony, and happiness" (125). It is this visionary message Max takes with him when he leaves the reservation to join his family in Tucson, hopefully beginning a new and more perceptive phase of his life.

As Max Hansen moves from the Navajo reservation to Tucson, so too does Fillerup move thematically from the There to Here subsection with its five stories exploring both vision and fatherhood. In "Family Plantation Day," Dave Peterson recounts the story of Floyd Fairbanks's bizarre accident, driving a John Deere tractor erratically into an irrigation canal. Dave sees what happens and interprets, but his perception, though entertaining, is valueless because it fails to motivate him to act.

In a gushy and engaging way, Dave tells us how perceptive he is: "You see, I notice things. I look, I observe. . . . Am I looking for foibles, cracks in the dike? . . . Whatever, I look, I listen, I see and hear things I maybe ought not" (4). Dave sits in sacrament meeting observing others, detecting a look, an action, a snip of dialogue—and then creates in

his mind interesting stories, embellishing surfaces into realities. With all of this perceptivity, however, Dave fails to act in important ways: he views his children more as stereotypically cute Mormon kids than as people worthy of his attention and thought; he has wildly fluctuating perceptions of his wife and never does engage meaningfully with her in her struggle over the issue of birth control; and he allows insensitive Church leaders to prate publicly about fertility and to organize family-mandated work projects, even though the key participant, Floyd Fairbanks, is childless. Dave is perceptive, but his vision is barren.

In "The Renovation of Marsha Fletcher," Marsha's vision is both barren and hostile. Though observant and imaginative, she's a misanthrope consumed by bitterness, the perceived victim, at all echelons, of a male-dominated universe. Like many of Flannery O'Connor's females, Marsha is a grotesque obsessed by appearances: her husband Robert flirts with "a chesty redhead" (42), but she married him in the temple three years later even though she still suspects him of infidelity. She is obsessed with cosmetic surgery, rejects a mastectomy to be performed by male surgeons, and rejects God himself, feeling that only a woman can understand her feelings. She sums up her perverted sense of self by writing to her daughter (another man-hater): "Woman is the nigger of the world" (34). It's through Marsha's distorted vision that we see her husband Robert, a person she describes as both abused and abusive: abused by his hypocritical father and abusive of his own sons. However deserved her status is as a victim in a male-dominated world, Marsha herself shrivels, retreating from anything and everything male, inviting her own death, both physical and spiritual.

Another story of male negation is "The Bowhunter." Jack Robinson, the protagonist, is an absent father, an *isolato*, a backslider. He's a misanthropic FBI agent, disillusioned with society, an escapist whose life is the hunt. The antithesis of William Faulkner's young Ike McCaslin, Jack too gets lost in the woods, leaving behind the accouterments of civilization, a necessary prelude to his vision. Then wandering, stricken by a virus, sufficiently stripped

of his pride, he eventually experiences his epiphany: he sees two elk, a father and son, imbuing them with mystical significance. Immediately after the encounter, he sees the way home. But the sign is barbed wire, and the imagery suggests hell, not paradise. The imagery, coupled with Jack's earlier reminiscence about the spiritual influence he felt at his baptism, an experience that gradually dissipated until he became a Sunday Mormon, leaves us skeptical that this second epiphany will have any enduring effect.

The final tale of fragmented vision is "Daddy-Daughter Date." On the surface Mitchell Kerns is the ideal LDS father, a person concerned about and interacting with his four daughters. In this story, he takes Kristin (his eight-year-old daughter) out for the evening. First they take a wedding gift to Bill and Suzanne Swenson. There the Swensons let Kristin hold their pet ferret, and Mitchell sees Kristin in a new light, capturing the sounds, smells, and sights of the moment, wishing, as a sentimental father, "to freeze the moment forever" (88). But the vision doesn't last. He and Kristin later visit a nursing home and talk to Jessie Walker, a person Kristin has been writing to. After the visit, Kristin asks her father some difficult questions, forcing him to confront his own mortality and a childhood memory of being abandoned by his father. The memory precipitates a tense and frightening scene as Mitchell and Kristin spontaneously join a sixties street dance, and he becomes, for one irrational moment, the projection of his own father.

"A Game of Inches," the final story in this section, moves us from fragmentation to wholeness. Flirting with clichés (such as "football is the game of life"), Fillerup's wit and irony make them work. Jim Peterson, a man of empathy and vision, strives to achieve the ever-illusive "golden mean." But Jim doesn't live in an ice-cream-and-cake world: his young son Davy is plagued by nightmares; Jim himself is an overworked university professor and an active Church member. Coping with a myriad of problems, Jim also finds time to extend himself to others: to Steve Boyak, a friend who is having marital problems, a person Jim describes as "a godless

man with a godlike heart" (111). Jim also befriends Derek, an introverted member of his Sunday School class, small, fatherless, abused, a victim with permanent bruises on his forearms. Jim spends time with them both, comforting two troubled souls. Then he returns to his family: his two-year-old son playing in the sandbox rushes to greet him; Jim smells the enchiladas Carla is cooking, his favorite meal; and, as he enters the home, he hears "the shuffle of excited feet, the shouts, 'Daddy's home!'" (116) Jim Peterson is perceptive enough to realize that all homecomings are not as idyllic as this one; but at the same time, he basks in the light of those he loves, achieving that delicate balance between vision and wisdom.

Michael Fillerup's *Visions and Other Stories* is an invaluable collection. Each story is carefully wrought, artistically conceived, and fully developed. Together the nine stories echo T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1943), effective in their thematic counterpointing, striking in their imagery, masterful in their exploration of theme.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Michael Fillerup, *Visions and Other Stories* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1990), 175. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>3</sup>*Dubliners*, edited by Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York: Viking Press, 1969).

# Embracing the Other: The Beloved Alien and Other Ethical Fictions of Orson Scott Card

Mick McAllister<sup>1</sup>

*Will you tell us about the other worlds out among the stars—the other kinds of men, the other lives?*

—Solve Harth in *The Left Hand of Darkness*

IN *THE COMPANY WE KEEP*, Wayne C. Booth observes that one of fiction's most important tasks is ethical: making the values and perspectives of other people real for us.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, novelist Ursula Le Guin argues in her essays, notably "American SF and The Other," that science fiction offers a unique opportunity to fully explore our xenophobia. As Le Guin puts it, "If you deny any affinity with another person or another kind of person, . . . you have denied its spiritual equality."<sup>3</sup> (99). In *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, Samuel R. Delaney offers that a strength of science fiction is that "there is no implicit limit on the distance from the self to the Other."<sup>4</sup> Writers like Le Guin, C. J. Cherryh, and Orson Scott Card use this opportunity to its full potential, and their work can be read as parables of cultural relativism.

Serious science fiction writers are profoundly ethical in their aims. A writer as journeyman as Robert Heinlein, Jerry Pournelle, Pamela Sargent, or Suzy McKee Charnas hefts his or her intellectual political baggage to the reader's lap, their politics essential to a full appreciation of their work. To fail to see ethics and the valuation of human behavior at the center of the work of Frank Herbert, Gene Wolfe, Philip K. Dick, and Theodore Sturgeon is to waste the effort of reading them. Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin begin their study of the genre, *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision*, with an acknowledgment of this goal, echoing in their foreword the purpose Stephen Daedalus took upon himself at the conclusion of Joyce's *Portrait of the*

*Artist as a Young Man*: "For the past century and a half, writers of what we have learned to call 'science fiction' have been trying to create a modern conscience for the human race." Later the two scholars summarize their discussion of, "Sex and Race in Science Fiction" thus:

*Science fiction has taken the question so spiritedly debated by the founding fathers of the United States—of whether the rights of man included black slaves as well as white slave-owners—and raised it to a higher power by asking whether the rights of being end at the boundaries of the human race.<sup>5</sup>*

Le Guin, in her recent science-fiction tour de force *Always Coming Home* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), points to ethics as a key to good fiction. In the appendices to this book, her fictional alter ego, the anthropologist Pandora, explains the attitude of the Kesh people toward narrative. Where the Euro-American attempts to distinguish "fact" from "fiction," the Kesh do not worry about the difference between "what happened" and "like what happened." Instead, they draw a hard ethical line between truth and falsehood: "The distinction," as Pandora puts it, "is one of intent."<sup>6</sup>

Le Guin, Cherryh, and Card have staked out the alien, the xenotype, as their special subject. Xenophobia, a fancy name for the emotional effect of "BEMs" (Bug-Eyed Monsters) and "LGMs" (Little Green Men), is a trademark of science fiction, a theme which may be traced back to Book Four of that hoary great-grandfather of science fiction, *Gulliver's Travels*.<sup>7</sup> Until recently, the movies insisted that the BEM has come to eat us and the LGM to enslave us, with only the occasional bleeding-heart liberal film to whine the contrary.<sup>8</sup> The racial un-

derpinnings of science-fiction parables of cultural conflict have often been only thinly veiled: is it merely happenstance that Ridley Scott's alien is black and its most graphic act of violence a hideous sexual parody? It is certainly no accident that Ursula Le Guin's creechies, protagonists of *The Word for the World Is Forest* (1972; New York: Berkley Publishing, 1977), the novella whose working title was "The Little Green Men," are identifiably based on American Indian materials.

The connection between our history and xenophobia is nowhere more transparent than in Le Guin's 1972 Hugo Award winner, *The Word for the World Is Forest*. The novel's surface tale is little more than a variation of the racial conflict central to our national history since Merry Mount and the Pequot War. Precipitated by a trivial incident, a native uprising nearly destroys the human colony on a new planet. The charismatic leader of the uprising is a little green man, and the main human character, a self-described "Conquistador" making the new planet in his own image, is a caricature of the xenophobic jock-adjusting chauvinist. The novel comes most interestingly to life when Le Guin takes us to the creechie villages, where we see the world from their holistic, mystic perspective. The cultures of Le Guin's "primitive" aliens, not only here but in *City of Illusion*, the Earthsea trilogy, as well as *Always Coming Home*, are directly connected to the books on American Indians, particularly the California tribes, written by her father and mother, Alfred and Theodora Kroeber.

Xenophobia. It is a distinctly Anglo obsession, this horror of the alien, and it tells us more about our own history and values as explorers than it does about the nature of the unknown Other. In his classic *We*, Yevgeny Zamyatin slips the shoe snugly on the foot where it belongs, when the human governors of Earth speculate about how their intended missions to alien civilizations will be met: "And if they will not understand that we are bringing them a mathematically faultless happiness, our duty will be to force them to be happy."<sup>10</sup> Having forced happiness on every primitive tribe we have encountered, Americans expect the same treatment from any technologically superior species that ever discovers Earth.

Xenophobia. It creates various nightmares projecting from our ugly self-image: mindless subhumans like Scott's alien or creatures like the predator of the movie of that name, which regard us as *varelse* (to use Card's term) or worse, as animals so far below it on the evolutionary ladder that we are no more than prey for a blood sport. Turned upside down, the result is noble creatures whose angelic intelligence and compassion serve as lessons in our evolving character. They are all the cardboard of self-defining parable. It is no different in kind from the history of our stereotyped view of the Indian, who appears in our fictions alternately rabid with blood lust and moon-eyed with love of nature.

The Indian has appeared in science fiction as a thematic key (in Ian Watson's *The Embedding* and *The Martian Inca*, Frank Herbert's *The Soul Catcher*, Roger Zelazny's *Eye of the Cat*) and as local color (in Sidney Lanier's Hiero novels, Andre Norton's *The Sioux Spaceman* and her Storm novels). C. J. Cherryh has drawn directly from American Indian cultures to invent her samurai/Apache mri, though most of her alien races are modeled on animal cultures, such as lions, iguanas, and ants, rather than on non-Western human cultures. Card has invented an enormously complex revision of the Ohio Valley cultures for the Hatrack River series. But in spite of this body of fiction, it is not by reimagining the American Indian (or the Australian aborigine, the African black, the Eskimo, the Lapp, or any other "alien and primitive" culture) that science fiction best educates us in cultural relativism. Our attitudes toward our fellow humans of each race and culture are fostered by a larger problem, our essential centering of all value judgments on our own self-interest. We judge not by universal standards but by ethnocentric ones, anthropocentric ones, valuing difference only to the degree it does not prevent others from being like us.

Shelfloads of science fiction novels invite us to examine our anthropocentricity, to consider the absolute Other, whatever physical form the intelligent presence may take. There is the work of Le Guin. Her collection *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (1987; reprint ed., New York: New American Library, 1988), abounds in Others: the

creature trapped in "Mazes," who dies at last because its captor cannot understand that the patterns it traces in the maze are a dancelike language of actions; the Ant Author who writes on acacia seeds the enigmatic "Eat the eggs! Up with the Queen." There is Stanislaus Lem's living planet *Solaris*. There are the lizards of C. J. Cherryh's *Forty Thousand in Gehenna* (New York: DAW Books, 1983) who communicate by arranging piles of stones in patterns, and the colonies of sentient ants in her novel *Serpent's Reach* (New York: DAW Books, 1980). Cherryh has specialized in the fully imagined alien culture, best exemplified by the iduve species at the center of her *Hunter of Worlds* (New York: DAW Books, 1977).

Each of these writers has a unique approach and agenda. For Orson Scott Card, the xenotype presents a constellation of theological problems; and his novels, particularly the Ender Wiggin series, address those problems. Card is best known locally for the Alvin Maker books, which use the origins of Mormonism to examine the nature of a spiritual life, and his historical novel *Saints* (New York: TOR Books, 1988). His best work, however, is the Ender Wiggin series, at once superb science fiction and a powerful examination of the religious issues that alien contacts must imply. In the first novel, *Ender's Game*, the insectile "buggers" destroy humans because we are so alien to their culture that they do not realize that we are a sentient species, and then humans annihilate them because we cannot communicate with them. In the second book, *Speaker for the Dead*, Card introduces the Stone Age piggies, who do their dearest human friends great honor by disemboweling them and are shamed beyond despair when they learn that humans "really die."

#### *I. Learn We Are Men*

*"Red-hive has learned to make agreements with minds-that-die, and no longer has trouble with death. What's more . . . they've learned to lie."*

—*Raen a Sul, Meth-Maren, in Serpent's Reach*

Recognition of the alien's essential "humanity" is a continuing theme of Card's fiction, including his novelization of James Cameron's film *The Abyss*

(Pocket Books, 1989). There and in the Ender Wiggin books, he explores the cultural and ethical nature of alien creatures and the problem of recognizing sentience, ethical systems, and culture in creatures whose physical and biological difference from us is absolute. His alien creatures have values and perspectives radically different from our own. However, their ethical points of view are so fully imagined that we come to understand, appreciate, and ultimately judge those points of view as well as our own in the light of a new moral vision.

In the first Ender Wiggin book, the theme is dehumanization. The adversary is an insectile species with an advanced technology. The "buggers," as humans call them, are a hive species with a shared consciousness. As Ender's guardian Colonel Graff puts it, they are to ants as we are to squirrels.<sup>11</sup> An individual is a physically disconnected cell of a larger creature whose brain/soul is the reigning hive queen. The whole creature exists as a single integrated consciousness. Ender's training includes learning everything there is to know about the buggers. They die when captured; the dying appears to be a simple disconnection from the hive mind. They do not smell, taste, or hear their environment, and they don't need radios or any other message systems. Their communication system becomes the clue that allows humans to discover faster-than-light communication.

Ender's training is intended to build his skill and ruthlessness without destroying his essential decency. He has been hand-picked for his brilliance and his character. His brother Peter, equally brilliant and ruthless, lacks Ender's compassion; his sister Valentine, equally brilliant and compassionate, lacks the ruthlessness a military commander must possess. This precocious troika of children changes the shape of human history as political leader, moral leader, and military savior. Ender recognizes the dilemma the military faces. He must understand the buggers to defeat them, but to really understand someone, as he explains to Valentine, leaves one no choice but to love them. The military solution to this problem is two brilliant strokes: first, train children, who are at once more malleable and less morally conscious than adults, as your champions; then tell them that the war is merely a simulation, a train-

ing mission. Ender destroys the entire bugger fleet and their home planet believing that he is playing a game.

Card does not allow the ethical problems of *Ender's Game* to resolve to black and white. The buggers are real. Such evocatively named horrors as the "Scathing of China" really happened. Their Second Invasion was repelled in a David-Goliath confrontation with the puny but victorious human fleet seventy years earlier. Some of the children being trained as warriors think the whole bugger story is a military conspiracy, a power ploy like the musical-chairs warfare in Orwell's *1984*. But the reader has the benefit of Card's headnotes, where we eavesdrop on the most powerful military and political leaders of Earth. By the time of the climactic battle, it is clear that what these men have done to their children was the only way to defeat the buggers, given their antagonism. The only ambiguity is a half-joking thought-experiment: "Are we sure we ought to win this war?" It is a question Ender answers with a simple biological imperative, long after he discovers the implications of the question.

In a discussion between Ender Wiggin and his mentor, Colonel Graff, they speculate about the causes of the bugger wars. Colonel Graff remarks that reasons are beside the point:

*The real decision is inevitable. If one of us has to be destroyed, let's make damn sure we're the ones alive at the end. Our genes won't let us decide any other way. Nature can't evolve a species that hasn't a will to survive. (278)*

Ender responds, "I'm in favor of surviving" (278). Twenty years later in *Speaker for the Dead*, asked how he could live with what he had done—the annihilation of a sentient species, Ender reaffirms those words. A species must choose to live.

Persuaded that the horrible dehumanization of these children was a necessary evil, we have our ethical perspective torqued one last time when we learn that the truth: While humanity was preparing to fight again, its fleet launched decades ago, the buggers, who had quit the Second Invasion not because of military defeat but because they had

learned that humanity was a sentient species, had "called off" the war. After Ender destroys the bugger home planet, he finds the last surviving bugger, the dormant hive queen. She invades his mind with the absolute link that the buggers used to communicate with each other, a link that is too transparent to allow lies. She explains to Ender, "We thought we were the only thinking beings in the universe, until we met you, but never did we dream that thought could arise from the lonely animals who cannot dream each other's dreams" (353). The buggers slaughtered humans because they thought they were clearing a desirable colony planet of troublesome vermin, an infestation of cockroaches. When they realized that they had done "murders," they stopped, horrified and shamed; and they grieved with a pain that Ender tells them could make humans forgive them, if they could communicate it to humanity.

Ironically, this inability to communicate is exactly what Colonel Graff speculated was the cause of the war. When Ender asks him, he suggests that a species which communicates directly needs no language. Their technology would not be based on the use of symbols or numbers. They don't need reading or writing, nor could they imagine any implications when they see printed symbols. We can't communicate with them; they don't even know we tried. They may have tried "to think to us," and our failure to respond made us seem nothing but a violent species of unintelligent life. As Ender summarizes, "The whole war is because we can't talk to each other" (278).

Ender annihilates them, but the dormant queen succeeds in communicating who the buggers were, and what the Bugger Wars meant, seen from another mind, in a book written by Ender Wiggin. The book becomes a religious document, the Hive Queen. Published anonymously, it becomes the holy book of a cult of cross-cultural tolerance whose mythic hero is the anonymous author, the Speaker for the Dead. No one knows that the original Speaker for the Dead was Ender Wiggin the Xenocide. This irony, that the human who taught

the species to love the buggers is the very man who destroyed them, is only one of many tensions of the second volume, *Speaker for the Dead*.

## II. Xenocide Dice

"Who among you, if his child asks for bread, gives a stone?"

—Jesus of Nazareth

"If the act is evil, then the actor is evil."

—Styrka in *Speaker for the Dead*

Like *Ender's Game*, *Speaker for the Dead* hinges upon human relationships with sapient alien species. Three thousand years after the Xenocide, a whole field of study, xenology, has developed, with a vocabulary of fine distinctions. Strangers may be *utlannings*, of our species but another community. They may be *framblings*, humans of another planet. They may be *ramen*, intelligent, self-aware, and morally responsible species other than humanity, like the buggers. Finally, *varelse* are those creatures with which we cannot communicate, who may or may not be ramen. For the first time since the xenocide of the bugger species, humankind has encountered intelligent aliens. A Stone Age culture on a colony planet, the creatures are immediately protected by cultural quarantine "for their own good." They are being studied by a family of xenologists, and they eviscerate the head xenologist. The colonists summon a Speaker for the Dead to "speak his death," and the speaker who responds is Andrew Wiggin, thirty-five years old thanks to the effects of near-light-speed travel and Ender incognito, secretly carrying the dormant hive queen pupa.

Ender is universally hated in human civilization as "the Xenocide," but when the new aliens kill the xenologists, a punitive military expedition is launched against the planet, a fleet carrying the weapon used against the buggers, a planet-destroying molecular bomb called "the Little Doctor." The novel resolves when the xenologists discover why the murders occurred, and Ender deposits the hive queen on the planet. It ends with the queen being born, the new alien species in a tripartite compact

with the nascent buggers and the human colonists, and the military fleet due to arrive in a decade. There is to be a third volume in the series.<sup>12</sup>

In a sense, Ender's Calvinist student on Trondheim is right when he says that the sapient aliens of Lusitania "are the only hope of our redemption."<sup>13</sup> Humanity of the novel's universe must prove that xenophobia is no longer a governing emotion, and we as readers are offered an opportunity to confront our own fear of the stranger. If there were any doubts that species relativism (a metaphor for cultural relativism) is one of Card's primary interests, *Speaker for the Dead* would allay them. Here there are not one but three non-human sapients. The buggers, in the form of the larval queen who can communicate telepathically with Ender, are an advanced species awaiting rebirth. If Ender chooses to give them that resurrection, he must have faith that "the monsters of our nightmares" can, as the queen insists, "live with you in peace" (*Ender's Game*, 355).

The piggies, the sapient aliens whose planet is the scene of the novel, are hunter/gatherers intelligent enough to learn to speak the human languages of the colonists. They look like upright pigs, but their biology is even more radically different than that of the buggers, and their culture is nearly incomprehensible to the humans studying them.

The third sapient alien is as interesting and unique as the others, Ender's "friend," Jane. She is that individuated computer consciousness which occupies our more abstract nightmares as universally as giant, murderous bugs provide us with visceral horror. Jane was born spontaneously from the intergalactic information network, and she controls it. She is a creature of godlike power, objectivity, and whim. And she wants to be the subject of Ender's next book, after he "speaks" for the piggies.<sup>14</sup>

*Speaker for the Dead* is set on Lusitania, a planet with one town-sized human colony, all Portuguese Catholics. The cult of the Speakers is a secular religion, a "humanism" based on the sanctity of all life and a commitment to the healing value of truth. Formed in response to Ender's anonymous truth-telling—the two books known collectively as the



Hive Queen and the Hegemon<sup>15</sup>—the Speakers for the Dead “held as their only doctrine that good or evil exist entirely in human motive, and not at all in the act” (39). It is an ethical view Card seems sympathetic to. Alvin Miller, destined to become the saintly Alvin Maker, learns his first moral lesson when he uses his telepsychic powers to trick a colony of cockroaches.<sup>16</sup> As a six-year-old, he has negotiated a truce with the household pests. The truce is based on mutual trust, and he lies to them so that they will attack his sisters. Like the buggers, they are “murdered,” but Alvin’s action is different in motive from Ender’s. Ender acted on the best information he had and from good motives. Alvin’s act was a lie for self-gratification and as such a sin. The interplay of truth, motive, and effect is the key to Card’s ethical universe.

Not surprisingly, the religious authorities on Lusitania see the Speaker as an adversary rather than a complement to their spiritual ministrations. Ender, on the other hand, sees himself as separate from rather than complementary to, or competitive with, any religion. His is, in the strictest sense, a secular religion, a blend of philosophy, psychiatry, and homily.

Truth, in the absolute sense, emerges as the highest value in both the completed novels of the Ender Wiggin series, but in a complex way. In *Ender’s Game*, the buggers are destroyed because so many manipulative deceptions are played by the humans. If Ender had known he was really destroying their planet, he might not have done it. For him, the knowledge would have created a moral dilemma. But circumstances revealed that his primary reason for killing them, human self-defense, was not applicable because they were no longer a threat. Card does not imply that Ender’s xenocide was wrong in an absolute sense. To resort to an applicable cliché, he leaves such judgments to God. Judged by the Speakers’ ethics, his action was exculpated by a good motive. It may be that the xenocide, whatever its moral implications for the politicians and military strategists who planned it and the twelve-year-old genius who unwittingly

committed it, was an act whose net effects will be good. The still-unpublished third book in the series may resolve this question, or it may not.<sup>17</sup>

The relationship of piggies and humans is a web of condescending deceit. To protect piggie culture from interspecies contamination, the xenologists are required to operate under circumstances that make it nearly impossible for them to understand that culture. Almost all of their conclusions are proven wrong in the climax of the novel, when Ender confronts the piggies point blank with questions that must be answered if the human colony is to survive. As Ender points out, “the rules governing human contact with the piggies did not really function to protect the piggies at all. They functioned to guarantee human superiority and power” (253). The piggies themselves have no trouble figuring this out. They understand the human agenda. As their spokesman puts it, “We are being murdered every day. Humans are filling up all the worlds. Here we are, on our one little world, watching the sky fill up with humans” (259).

The human lie, as Ender and the piggies know and the xenologists realize once they examine it, is *hubris*, pure and simple. Ender illustrates the human point of view to the piggies when he proposes to give them limited knowledge of higher technology: “I’ll give you everything I can that won’t destroy you.” The piggie spokesman exposes the hypocrisy of that offer, saying, “If we are ramen, then it is ours to decide, not yours! And if we are vareise, then you might as well kill us all right now, the way you killed all the hive queen’s sisters!”

This confrontation is the climax of the novel. The piggie has done to Ender Wiggin what he as speaker is pledged to do therapeutically for others: it has spoken the whole truth, to let its force work. As a result, the Lusitanians learn that their Speaker is the Xenocide and they must deal with that realization. The mark of Cain, as Ender calls it, gives him additional moral power when he speaks for the new covenant being arranged between the piggies and the Lusitanians. The truth about him puts in human perspective the individual guilts that have nearly destroyed the families of the two slain xenologists. Confronted with his own guilt, Ender

weeps; and when the piggies learn the meaning of his tears, they realize the human implications of their gruesome slaughter of the two xenologists.

At the beginning of the novel, when news of the death of the first xenologist reaches Ender on the planet Trondheim, he proposes to his students in a religion class that the killing of the xenologist presents humans with a dilemma: "Was the act evil, or was it, somehow, to the piggies' understanding at least, good?" (40). Soon afterward, when Jane shows Ender a video of the first murdered xenologist, whom the piggies disemboweled alive, he recognizes that they are "ramen," equals of humanity. He sees that the death was neither punitive nor religious, but "purposeful, like doctors working to save a patient's life" (69). Not only is he right, but by the novel's end he must do the very thing the piggies have done because it is the only covenant they will be bound by.

The piggies are our only chance at redemption. When word of the killing of the xenologist reaches human cultures, the actions of this little Stone Age people on a distant planet inspire not thoughts of cultural relativism but instead unreasoning fear. As Andrew Wiggin says to his students, only moments after they have been condemning the Xenocide of the Bugger War,

*Underneath your hatred of Ender the Xenocide and your grief for the death of the buggers, you also feel something much uglier: You're afraid of the stranger, whether he is utlanning or framing. When you think of him killing a man that you know and value, then it doesn't matter what his shape is. He's varelse. (40)*

Proud of their moral superiority to the humans who destroyed the buggers three thousand years earlier, the humans in *Speaker for the Dead* are never asked to vote on the question of whether Ender should release the living hive queen. We need little experience with the fragility of moral snobbism to guess why.

The analogy to our own history is apt. In exasperation with the moral judgments descending upon them from the East Coast, westerners of the nineteenth century pointed out that when there were

Indians on that American coast, the people of tolerant Massachusetts wiped them out. It is easy to preach tolerance to the one who owns the ox being gored. The Ender Wiggin series is about moral absolutes, although it affirms none. Without reading the third volume, one can safely assume that readers of the new book will be given another perspective on the nature and implications of humanity's most basic prejudice, the fear of the Other. If we can understand the bug-eyed monster and respect the little green men, perhaps we can learn to live with the strangers among us, understanding and respecting their identities, secure and evolving in our own.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Mick McAllister is a former English professor whose publications include articles on American Indian literature, film, science fiction, the teaching of writing, and computers. He holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of New Mexico; he is the author of two computer books. This paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 27 January 1990, at Westminster College of Salt Lake City. Copyright 1990, Dancing Badger Enterprises. Printed by permission. The citation style of the original has been adapted to conform to the style used in the *Annual*.

<sup>2</sup>*The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>*The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1979), 99.

<sup>4</sup>*The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1977), 278.

<sup>5</sup>*Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), vii, 189.

<sup>6</sup>*Always Coming Home* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 500.

<sup>7</sup>Of course, it is not confined to science fiction. It is a key to Melville's *Typee* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to name a couple of distinguished examples.

<sup>8</sup>*The Day the Earth Stood Still* comes to mind, but *Day of the Triffids*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Fifty Million Years from Earth*, *War of the Worlds*, Rod Serling's wonderful "To Serve Man," with its cheap and hilarious punchline, and *Dr. Who and the Daleks* counter it as fast as I can type the names. Only in the last decade have filmmakers begun to emphasize the sentimental obverse of the cliché, with loveable ET's and nameless powers on the moons of Jupiter (2010). And the tradition of the murderous alien reaches its apotheosis in Ridley Scott's original *Alien*. In Scott's film, the menacing alien is an inscrutable merciless hunter of humans, its biology and culture unimagined except for its role as menace. By comparison, James Cameron's brilliant

sequel, *Aliens*, provides no less menace but builds a culture and rationale for the creatures and even, if the film is read carefully, introduces an element of moral ambiguity and species relativism into the film's imagined universe.

<sup>9</sup>*The Word for the World Is Forest* (1972; reprint ed., New York: Berkley Publishing, 1976), 6.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Scholes and Rabkin, *Science Fiction*, 204.

<sup>11</sup>*Ender's Game* (New York: TOR Books, 1985), 272. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>12</sup>The third volume, *Xenocide*, was published in mid-1991. For the most part, it extends the themes of the previous two books (and, like them, ends with an implication of a sequel). It also brings forward a less central ethical issue, the nature of identity.

<sup>13</sup>*Speaker for the Dead* (New York: TOR Books, 1986), 38.

<sup>14</sup>And in a sense, she is. Her synthetic yet real identity is the key to the action of *Xenocide* and central to the philosophical theme as well.

<sup>15</sup>Card consistently does not italicize the titles, suggesting that the books have the special status of the Bible.

<sup>16</sup>*Seventh Son*, Volume 1 in *Tales of Alvin Maker* (New York: Guild America Books, 1987), 60.

<sup>17</sup>It does not. From the perspective of its moral landscape, it seems foolish to have expected it to.

# A Look at Contemporary Mormon Poetry: One Harvester's Opinion

MaryJan Gay Munger<sup>1</sup>

I'VE HAD TROUBLE COMING UP with a clever approach to this review of *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems*, edited by Eugene England and Dennis Clark.<sup>2</sup> Failing at the clever approach, you'd think I could find an impressive-sounding sentence to start everything off with a bang. But I haven't been able to, and I've decided that I probably shouldn't for this paper. The virtue of the best of these poems is a directness and sincerity that comes from an engagement with a particular way of life. It seems hypocritical to try to talk about these poems in any way other than with a similar candor.

So, I'll tell you now that the poems I've chosen to discuss were selected, not because they seemed especially significant in this cultural milieu or because they showcased post-modern language theory, but primarily because I liked them and wanted to talk about them. So that you will know how to evaluate *my* evaluations, let me quickly sketch in the outlines of my basic ideas about poetry before we get to the poems themselves.

First of all, I like poetry and I think it's important. I've been sad to see talented poets write as if they believe that words are too untrustworthy to communicate anything significant. Maybe thanks to our Mormon didacticism, which sometimes places more of a value on the usefulness of words than on their beauty, most Mormon poets do seem to have retained a healthy trust in their tools. Instead of hesitating because they are afraid they cannot *really* communicate, they simply begin speaking.

Along with expressing a trust in words however, a hefty majority of the poems in this anthology exhibit a delight in words which makes them rewarding to read aloud. This is what I call vocal

poetry—poetry that you want to voice, that you want to send washing against your own tightly drawn eardrums.

Along with this vocal/aural quality, I also expect good poetry to evoke specific, almost concrete images of the world—the taste of fruit, colors, sounds, the roughness of tree bark, and so forth. I think these two qualities—a strong vocal sense and accurate, vivid images—among other qualities, help bring the best poems up from the easy, tidy world of theory to the level of real life. This in turn allows the poets to talk about their ideas and experiences in an interesting and worthwhile way.

You notice I put ideas before experience. Unfortunately, so do too many of our poets. Whether this is a negative result of Mormon didacticism or a holdover from the worldly paradigm of ideal over real, I don't know; but I do know that I don't like it. I think it's ridiculous—especially for Mormons who claim a God of flesh and bone (as opposed to a devil who is pure spirit) and who claim to believe that having a body is a blessing—I think it's ridiculous for us to buy into that old paradigm that sets the body up as a whipping post for the immaculate spirit. Ideas *are* important, but primarily so *within* physical experience. The ideas of faith, of love, of peace are all good and important ideas; but not nearly as gripping as faith in action in a real person's real life.

The greatest offenders in this book, in my opinion, are the ancestral and the doctrinal poetry. I don't think it's impossible to write good poetry about our ancestors or good poetry informed by doctrine. But we need to avoid the temptation of sacrificing the experience, the whole untidy truth of that experience, for the sake of the idea. I hope

you'll see in the best of the poetry that we're going to get into the fertile mixed-bag treatments, the combinations of contentment, joy, regret, anger, faith, and doubt with which most of us face the actualities of our rich and messy lives.

I'll begin with the ancestral poetry mentioned earlier. Let me say again, I don't think that poetry written about pioneer ancestors (whether they are biological or spiritual ancestors) is doomed to fail; but when we feel we must paint our ancestor's lives with a heroic brush and so leave out anything we decide is paltry, weak, or overly human, it will be awfully hard to write anything movingly and successfully true.

"Nellie Unthank" by Iris Parker Corry has been praised by Miriam Murphy for its "strong narrative voice" which allows Corry to tell her "pioneer heroine's story" "so directly and without sentimentality that poem and subject become one." All that is verifiably correct; but while reading the anthology I kept returning to this poem because I could not understand why it failed to grip me at all. It seems to lack whatever it is that old pioneer journals have—something like a sense of humor and a sense of individual response, or emotion—which would call from me an answering feeling of wonder, pity, or intimate gratitude.

The journals and the pioneer's own stories are spoken by the sufferers and enjoyers themselves. This poem and others like it are spoken by distanced observers. It reads like a newspaper obituary, full of names, places and the external facts of Nellie's life—which accounts for its nonsentimental starkness but also for its distance. We don't see much into Nellie herself. Instead we get an outline of what we already know about all pioneer lives. In our solemn-faced poetry we seem to forget the pioneers were people, with softnesses and jokes and yearnings and resentments. Poems like "Nellie Unthank" are valuable attempts to tap into a rich historical vein. But there should be more ways to approach our pioneer ancestry than merely retelling the idea we all have about pioneer life.

One poem about a pioneering experience that I do like very much is Clinton F. Larson's "Homestead in Idaho." I have to admit there is something

self-consciously heroic about the poem especially in the language Larson uses; but it works, partly because Larson lets Solomon speak for himself first. Solomon's own simple words give us his grief straight:

*I travelled as hard as I could, considering the horses,  
And kept looking and looking for the smoke far off  
In front of me, coming from the chimney,  
To tell me I was near. But I never saw it.*

The poem works, too, merely because the lines of words are often so beautiful in themselves, especially in the second section. And then there is such a loving attention to details: Solomon's square farmer's hands folding and unfolding the newspaper clipping, Geneva's hair, "brown as a veil of earth," a sunset that creeps down the sky "like frost and the glory of God," the "severe and immediate rattle" of the snake. And this is not a stock case history of the hardships of pioneer life but a story of Solomon's grief and Geneva's anguished decision. Maybe even more importantly, this poem never forgets it is a dramatic story. The slow sentences that give us Solomon's leavetaking and then the short frantic sentence fragments that take Geneva from the rattling snake bite to the cabin show Larson's commitment to his story, rather than to any point he feels must be affirmed about pioneers in general.

"The Woman Whose Brooch I Stole" by Susan Howe, although not strictly an ancestor poem, successfully brings to life a woman who is separated from the poet by time and death. Thus, it shows us what Howe could conceivably do to bring to life those ancestors who are similarly distanced from us. Again, I think this poem is successful because the focus is on imagining the actual person who wore the brooch, not on our general, stereotyped idea of women of the previous generation. The speaker salvages a dead woman's costume jewelry from a dumpster and discovers something of the woman herself:

*Her name was Mabel and she liked to bowl,  
Crocheted doilies covered frayed arms  
Of her overstuffed chairs, and she accepted gifts  
She'd never use—stationery and boxed soap.*

*I didn't take it all, just earrings,  
Silver with blue stones, cat's eye green,  
And the pair to match the brooch,  
Glorious bauble, and I wear it  
To see her, fierce behind the pin,  
Coming through in pink glitter and gold.*

The sharp details and the unexpectedness of this revelation in a dumpster make this poem seem real and true. In addition, the occasional alliteration, the precise word choice, and sensitive line breaks also make this poem good vocal poetry.

Another good vocal poem is John S. Harris's "Fallow." It's written mostly in the simple diction appropriate to the intimate pain of childlessness Harris is trying to express. There's also some nice humor, gentle and yet also a little painful, a little biting, in the metaphors this farming couple use to talk about their inability to have children. After venting their feelings of failure and their bewildering pain, the husband suggests they "plant again." Up to this point it's a graceful and believable poem. But in the last stanza, Harris's sure control slips. Here are the last five lines:

*The plowing seems a ritual now  
Of some forgotten faith  
Or a prayer to a departed god.  
But it comforts those that live  
When all the meaning's gone.*

That last line especially hits a false, melodramatic note for me. Unfortunately, coming as it does at the most critical place in the poem, it casts a long, bleak shadow back over the rest of the poem. As a result, what I had thought was a kind of pleasing gallows humor in the two speakers I now see as poetic posturing.

For contrast, look at another poem with a related theme and similar action that refuses to indulge in this kind of damaging self-pity. "Coming Apart Together," by Mary Lythgoe Bradford is admittedly striving for a lighter touch and yet the subject she chooses, the aging of the body and drawing near death, has similar potential to fall into a "Woe is me" pose. Happily, it doesn't. The last

stanza is particularly enjoyable. After describing "our coming decay and dissolution" the poem's two lovers

*... fall upon each other  
in springtime lust just as if we still had  
all our teeth, hair, eyesight, and internal organs  
just as if we had been created brand new this year  
just as if we ourselves had invented  
the weather, our bodies, and love itself.*

Probably this poem wouldn't have been as believable in its final celebration if the poem's speaker had not been so matter-of-factly and self-deflatingly detailed about her body's decay as she is in the earlier lines.

Two other poems, these by Emma Lou Thayne, struck me with this same realistic and joyful celebration of the enduring physical creation. "Love Song to the End of Summer" is really a love song to her body, that "good old leather tiger half domesticated"—its purpose, to "learn early what you [my body] are for forever." Thayne does not see life as the imprisonment of her spirit in an unclean, troublesome body (an alien belief which a surprising number of Mormons seems to adhere to). Instead she says tenderly and gratefully to her body:

*You may think I forget [you]. But you do not let me.  
By now I know better. I come back—  
Still, you never take me not surprised, faithful one,  
by how to arrive, and the pleasure of sweat,  
and how to shiver away the bee.  
You move to the song behind the dance,  
Even after a standard, plain white, unstriped day,  
you ripple in our sleep and wait, mostly unperplexed...*

In "Considering—the End," Thayne thinks about what she would want to keep of the physical world if it were completely destroyed in "the holocaust ahead." She begins with "Blue mountains against a black sky," and continues her finely detailed list with:

*First apricot pickle sharp, a phone ringing on time, ...  
smell of pinon in fire, onion in stew. ... Hot soup,  
hot bath, ...*

*Aging slowly from the bones outward, time to pick and choose.*

*A wooden spoon, the white whisper of needle in cloth, Laughing . . . like skis on snow.*

*Smell of soap, hot animal. An apple, crisp. A ball hit, Tongue of a lover, dream of a dead mother stroking our cheek.*

The poem grows towards a realization of the goodness of creation and rejects the "holocaust ahead" as the only possible ending of our story.

Of course, celebration is not the only honest response to the facts of our physical existence, as Lance Larsen shows in his beautiful poem "Tadpoles." For the remembered boy in Larsen's poem, the onset of puberty, especially in the girls around him, was (and still is) a bewildering thing. He seems to wish for the days when hugging a girl "was like hugging myself/ like touching a flower you hope will never open." This poem feels true, partly from the straightforward, childlike way in which it is told, partly from its curious mix of nostalgia for what the speaker feels is a lost innocence and the sense of yearning to understand those females who were once "safe as a brother," but are now "strange as stars," "like whispers in a foreign movie," as well as the ambiguous suggestion that the ungrasped secret they encompass is both "pleasurable" and painful as "tiny stabs."

"The Servant Girl," by Patricia Gunter Karamesines, is one of my favorite poems both for its language and imagery. It dramatizes, through the servant girl, our recurring inability to see the physical world in the same wonderingly appreciative way that the Creators see it. The plural speakers of the poem, to whom the house of creation belongs, notice details lovingly and with reverence. They linger over details like a "wisteria spray" the servant "has tucked inside her collar [which]/ Compares its lavender against her skin" or a "gust of sassafras,/ An unseen spectre . . . [that] hovers in the room./ Perhaps it is on her hands." For the speakers the "baneberry upright in its spiny-red veins, . . . its long stalked/ Eyes pressing into the air . . . sits like a god." For the servant girl the baneberry is just something to "break . . . off" and bring inside, just as yellow poppies are something to "quickly

cut" and "vase." As the poem continues, the speakers lament the servant girl's two faults. Her first fault is that she broke "the looking glass over the divan." By doing this, I assume she cannot see herself as the speakers do, "barefoot, damp, and pliant like a sapling." Her apparent lack of awareness and love for physical reality likely leads to her second fault—she resists experiencing the Creators of that physical world: "she thinks to say I love you to someone loved/ Is straining clarity, so she seldom prays/ Except as an afterthought." At least in my interpretation of this poem, the servant girl—like many of us—is so caught up in the abstracts of what ought to be done that she is "like an aphid on a winding leaf/ Staring through water beads with unwondering eyes."

The second grouping of poetry of mixed success is doctrinal poetry. While all aspects of our lives and all our attempts to understand our places within the world are really part of our religion, what I call doctrinal poetry consciously focuses on a specific doctrinal idea. The less successful doctrinal poetry tries to rely solely on the power of the idea under discussion for its beauty and strength. I won't spend time giving examples of this because I think we all recognize it (probably because we've all written some of it). Its hallmarks are often abstract phrases, universe-sweeping statements, and over-solemnity. The successful doctrinal poetry in this anthology seems instead to be an experience with a certain doctrine rather than a contemplation of it. This poetry is uniquely and vividly detailed and simply told.

Colin B. Douglas's "Take, Eat" (which I like much better than his biblical-sounding "Adoni: Cover Me with Thy Robe") is a striking example of an unusual, unexpected experience of Christ's continuing atonement, his grace and love for the speaker, and the speaker's guilty implication in his sacrifice:

*Take, Eat*

*Like a deer he comes to me,  
parting the ferns,  
Like a deer with bright antlers.  
I chase him across meadows,*

*Beside streams I pursue him,  
And he does not weary.  
But in the thicket he surprises me;  
He lets my arrow pierce him.  
He gives me of his flesh at evening,  
And in the bright morning,  
Like a deer he comes to me.*

Randall Hall's "Passover—a Mirrored Elegy" is another powerful poem about Christ's atonement, this time stepping into what might have been the experience of the Savior as he learned, line upon line about the sacrifice required of him. In this poem Hall asks:

*How many years from Bethlehem  
Until the awful eloquence  
Of wine and lamb  
And bitter herbs  
Took his breath,  
Stunned Him suddenly with knowledge  
Revealing that the blood  
Once painted on the lintels and the door posts  
Was his own  
And the slain lamb but his shadow and mirror?*

Linda Sillitoe's "Song of Creation" puts into living words that unique idea from Mormon theology of a creative Heavenly Mother and Father working together:

*Father bridled winds, my child,  
to keep the world new.  
Mother clashed  
fire free from stones  
and breathed it strong and dancing,  
... the color of her hair.*

Sillitoe's poems "Letter to a Four-Year-Old Daughter" and "an early elegy in lower case" for me recreated in sharply etched details some of my own faith-stretching responses to hard things inside and outside of the Church.

Another delightful poem, and one of my favorites, is "Light" by Lance Larsen, which I like to read as a newcast parable of the virgins and their lamps, as well as a comment on what it means to be a Saint, in the Mormon sense of the word.

*A boy comes selling light,  
no badges or letters of introduction,  
just a paper sack of no-name bulbs  
and a story about wanting to visit  
his grandfather in Escondido. All this  
on a morning so yellow that apricot buds,  
tight as fists, threaten to unsmile.  
But I believe him—for two dollars  
I get variable wattage and a sweepstake  
chance at a telescope. And safety.  
I wrap my bulb in cashmere and lock it away.  
For now I'll use G.E. bulbs.  
But later, on a night when the moon  
wears its blood in a smile  
and the angels of light have been confined  
on the back of a drunken mule,  
I'll replace the bulb on the porch.  
Then from my front room, I'll watch,  
like any patient child of the covenant,  
for the destroying angel to pass me by.*

I've run out of time, before running out of poems to talk about. There are poems I'll have to leave mostly unmentioned, like "Top of the Ferris Wheel" by Kathy Evans, R. A. Christmas's "Self-Portrait as Brigham Young," Loretta Randall Sharp's "At Utah Lake" and "For Linda," Number 3 from Tim Liu's "Variations on Death," "Our Town," "When it Stopped Singing" and "Sabbatical" by Donnell Hunter, "Learning to Quilt" by Dixie Lee Partridge, Mary Blanchard's "Bereft" and "Liar," and by Margaret Rampton Munk, "The Nurses" and "Remission" from the long work "One Year." And these are just the poems that I especially liked.

You'll have to read this anthology for yourselves. Probably you will find some that will make you shake your heads over my blindness to their obvious merit. And, in fact, I hope that you do.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>MaryJan Gay Munger delivered this paper at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 26 January 1991 at Westminster College, Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup>*Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989). All quotations of poems in this paper are from this work.



# Franklin Fisher's *Bones*: The Effaced Identity of the Mormon Missionary

Joe Peterson<sup>1</sup>

ADOLESCENCE IS HELL. As adults, we can't help but heave a sigh of relief that those years are over and done with. For most, three conditions make those years agonizing. First, the beginnings of an adult intellect stirs within us. Second, some sadistic demon sends buckets of hormones surging through our bodies. And finally, as we stumble past childhood, through adolescence and into late adolescence, we undergo repeated metamorphoses of self, casting off one identity and assuming another, like a rattlesnake periodically shedding its skin.

Robert Segal has suggested that, for Freud, the psychological aims of the first half of life are, first, gaining independence from one's parents; second, finding sexual fulfillment with a mate (another kind of independence); and third, groping for a workable sense of adult identity<sup>2</sup>.

At nineteen, Mormon boys (should I call them men?) are involved in these concerns with feverish intensity. How does a mission affect these processes? At times, I have jokingly described a mission as follows: "Imagine the most antithetical life-style to that of a normal nineteen- to twenty-one-year-old. That's a Mormon mission!"

Franklin Fisher's novel, *Bones*, demonstrates far better than I could the potentially devastating effects of a mission on the psychological processes of a late-adolescent character. Exploring one Mormon youth's odyssey through the already dangerous realms of late adolescence, complicated further by the mission experience, the novel tells the story of Lorin Hood, a Mormon boy from Randolph, Utah, who, before his mission, is living among a bohemian group of painters and intellectuals in Southern California. Lorin decides to repent of nearly in-

numerable breaches of the law of chastity and goes on a mission. While a missionary, Lorin meets Alice, a married woman with whom he conducts a short but intense sexual affair. Excommunicated, Lorin travels back to his old haunts and tries to heal a crippled and confused sense of identity.

In this journey of self-discovery, Lorin goes through three perilous phases: First, the pre-mission phase, in which he casts about for a workable sense of self and indulges in frenzied erotic encounters, which take place often in his lurid imagination, but just as often in reality; second, the mission itself, in which, as a kind of refugee of the pre-mission vicissitudes, Lorin joyfully embraces the Church's "program" but, unable to completely divest himself of his former libidinous self, ends up excommunicated for an "indiscretion"; and finally the post-mission phase, in which Lorin, emotionally crippled and nearly insane, approaches total disintegration of the self and finally begins the process of recovery.

In this paper, I should like to examine three themes that intertwine themselves in Fisher's three-part plot: The themes of intellectual complexity, healthy sexuality, and identity.

From the very first scene, Fisher presents Lorin as one given to probing intellectual and ethical dilemmas. The year is somewhere in the mid-forties; Lorin is presumably nine or ten and has just raided a neighbor's "victory garden" for peas. As he skulks home with his booty—a handful of peas—one pea falls into the underbrush:

*He pawed through the leaves but it had vanished, and he sat paralyzed by complexities. He could return to the vine and supply his loss, but he knew the thought would nag him that he might have gone*

*back anyway and thus possessed one more pea than he had initially. He could of course take two more peas and accomplish that hypothetical advantage, but how could he be sure he would not have taken two if he had gone back without losing one, in which case he would still have been one ahead of the best he could hope for now.<sup>3</sup>*

Lorin tortures himself with the complexity of the lost pea until his mother—the recurring symbol of guilt in the novel—finds him “sniveling, his mouth full of chewed peas, unable to explain his tears, which she ascribed to fear of punishment” (3).

Fisher further develops Lorin’s intellectual openness and willingness to consider all angles in the first section of the novel where Lorin, a “beatnik” painter in Southern California, both rebels against and yearns for his Mormon heritage. Lorin ruminates that “you didn’t want to forget that you were a cultural Mormon, because your heritage defined you and fed your art” (18). He meets with fellow beatnik painters in a bohemian coffee shop called The Blue Couch and paints Book of Mormon characters in urban settings—the Angel Moroni on a Harley Davidson motorcycle, for example. In the same way that the child Lorin honestly considered the ethical complexity of stolen peas, the young man Lorin forthrightly deals with the complexities of his current life style: a variety of sexual partners and evenings spent in abandoned revelry among free-thinking companions. While living with his girlfriend Yvonne, Lorin meets and beds Glorianna—an act that leads to his eventual breakup with Yvonne. Cut adrift from his lover, Lorin increasingly thinks his other friends are shallow and eventually goes home, apparently to “repent” and prepare for a mission.

Like most Mormons, Lorin’s parents teach their children sexual restraint. As a young boy, Lorin had drawn an erotic picture and had hidden it under some dirty clothing in his drawer. His mother finds it and pins it to his bedspread to let him know she knows:

*That night his mother came into his room after he was in bed and asked him if he ever played with his penis. He said no. She told him about a boy she had known in school who had gone insane and had to be locked up in the hospital in Provo for the rest of his*

*life, with his arms strapped down. He didn’t do it at all, Lorin said. Everyone at school knew why he had gone insane, his mother said. Even the girls. Lorin assured her he never did. Some people went blind, she said. He never would do it either, he promised. She sat crying on the edge of his bed. He lay there with the covers pulled up to his chin, blinking back tears as the ceiling grew dark. (4)*

Despite this puritanical upbringing, in the first part of the novel, Lorin gives himself over completely to pleasures of the flesh while in Southern California. His imagination, like that of any young man, is continually preoccupied with incredibly detailed erotic fantasies featuring his current lover and other women he meets. When Lorin visits Utah, his bishop asks him why he hasn’t gone on a mission, and he truthfully tells his bishop about his not being a virgin, but deceitfully hides the degree to which his virginity is lost—if such a thing can be measured. His mind, it seems, turns continually between lust and guilt:

*It was while sweating naked in a dark room after making love that you wondered how you would feel if the telephone rang and your father told you your mother had just died. . . . And you could hear your mother’s voice in your ear. It said, “Oh, Lorin.” It was a disappointed voice, weary from having read you stories at bedtime when you were small and wore jammies to bed. . . . The guilt was more controllable, he had noticed, while you were still horny. The instant you exploded, you knew you had let everybody down. (17)*

When Lorin leaves Yvonne at a party to have sex with a girl he has become attracted to, his social connections and developing sense of identity begin to disintegrate. Yvonne, in effect, kicks him out of his apartment. Disillusioned with his friends at The Blue Couch, Lorin packs his belongings in his car and camps at beaches and stays a few days with friends, but basically, he feels tired of being what he has become in Southern California. His sense of identity is not workable nor easily sustained. He returns to Utah like a refugee. Fisher writes,

*At the last place he stayed [with a girl whose husband was away in Germany]...regrettably he took advantage of his host's absence [and] forgot his toothbrush and mouthwash on the day he finally left for Utah. A man's disintegration began with his possessions, and he was getting away just in time (71).*

So Lorin finds himself on a mission. Perhaps Lorin's sense of frustration and fatigue with the turbulence of his late adolescence isn't universal; but for young men like Lorin, a mission may seem like a calm at the end of a storm. Perhaps the struggle to establish a stable adult sense of identity is so difficult that Mormon youth willingly deliver themselves into the hands of the paternalistic Church.

Young Mormons like Lorin initially feel a kind of euphoria in the mission field that grows out of this sense of relief coupled with the sense that the Church gives them a "coherent perspective on the world."<sup>4</sup> Andrew Malcolm points out that,

*for many of the people subjected to [the pressures of strong group affiliation] the experience is extremely revivifying and joyous, at least for a while. There is every reason to believe, for example, that during the period when the Third Reich was establishing its hegemony over most of Europe the majority of Germans were exhilarated.<sup>5</sup>*

As I observed above, missionary life—both in the novel and in real life—is completely antithetical to the life of a normal nineteen- to twenty-one-year-old. Is it healthy, one can't help asking, to oblige a missionary to lead a life style so unnatural to a person his age and so nonconductive to normal adolescent processes? If Freud is right that two of the basic concerns of the first half of life are independence and identity, then perhaps a mission is not the healthiest experience for a Mormon youth. In fact, one Mormon scholar goes as far as to show direct parallels between brainwashing techniques used in Red China and "thought reform" techniques used in the Missionary Training Center.<sup>6</sup>

Just as I did on my own mission, Lorin feels that he is doing something immensely meaningful—and yet he remarks that deep down he hates what he is doing. All three of the themes that weave through

the first section—intellectual complexity, sexual behavior, and identity—also run through this second section.

According to many people, a mission impairs a Mormon youth's analytic ability. Michael Quinn, for example, points out that the mission may be a broadening experience ("for the first time, most of these kids are seeing common-law marriages—and suffering on a grand scale"); however, more often it is a confined experience ("It is also a narrowly focused experience, however, because they are not out there to alleviate suffering but to convert.") One BYU female graduate student is quoted as saying, "For two years they have been mouthing canned sentences like programmed mannequins." And BYU professor, J. Bonner Ritchie, remarks, "[Returned missionaries] have a hard time analyzing complex issues or coping with intellectual ambiguity."<sup>7</sup>

For a boy who appreciates the metaphysical and ethical complexity of a stolen pea lost in the underbrush, the "thought-terminating clichés" that missionaries use are both alluring and troubling:

*He sat up late pouring over texts and supplements and reference guides until his eyes hurt, the better to have at his finger's ends the riposte to every challenge. . . . He had committed to memory the location, chapter and verse, of every detail, every fugitive utterance in the Old and New Testaments (indexed, for convenience, in his missionaries' guide) referring to modern-day revelation, in order to soften up his listeners to the realization that they must have believed in such a thing all along if they accepted the Bible. (76)*

However, Lorin is inclined to go far beyond traditional dogma, drawn to the mystical side of Mormonism, and he—to the dismay of his senior companion—eagerly tells new contacts about the Adam-God theory, polygamy, and any number of other "mysteries."

In fact, the key to one "conversion" is a story Lorin tells of how Joseph Smith was so filled with spiritual intensity that he actually saw through the ends of his fingers and toes. Lisa, a young married woman, responds to this story, since she has had the same experience—during an orgasm. After Lisa is

baptized, Lorin takes advantage of his companion's illness, finds Lisa, and reverts to his former libidinous self.

One could also ask, in view of this scene, if it is healthy to take a young person in the peak of sexual tension out of his normal social environment and impose the kinds of strictures upon him that a mission does. Granted that before his mission, Lorin is what many would call "promiscuous"; nevertheless, is it appropriate to take him from that extreme to complete prohibition on anything beyond a handshake? Joe J. Christensen, former president of the Missionary Training Center, has remarked that "attraction between the sexes is as strong as ever between the ages of 19 and 21, . . . [but] we set these missionaries apart and they learn that they can control these drives."<sup>8</sup> BYU professor, J. Bonner Ritchie comments that,

*the sex problems of Mormon youth are the worst of any religious sub-group in America. . . . Dating is a hard thing for returned missionaries, because they haven't learned the skills of intersexual relationships.<sup>9</sup>*

In addition to intellectual and sexual development, Lorin and other missionaries concede their identity development to the missionary system. All missionaries dress alike, behave alike, and even strive to think alike. Most of a missionary's decisions are made for him: no movies, television, popular music, or telephone communication with family and friends. Remaining decisions are made "by committee": The missionary is to go nowhere and do nothing by himself, and he spends every hour of every day in a preestablished way, accounting for his time meticulously in a report to his leaders. Fisher writes that wearing "a funny kind of underwear" was,

*one of the things that, thirteen months into his new life, [Lorin] had not gotten used to. Another was wearing a dark suit that itched every day. Another was opening someone's gate, walking through someone's front yard up to a door, feeling watched from behind the curtains, and knocking. Another was not drinking coffee (75).*

In fact, the mission takes away the missionary's name, replacing it with the perfunctory "Elder" or "Sister." On one occasion, Lorin called a companion by his first name and the companion from that time forward "never seemed quite at ease with him and never went to sleep before Lorin did" (77). And again, while in the temple, Lorin commits the ultimate faux pas—he tells another missionary his secret temple name, to which the missionary responds, "You're not supposed to tell anybody that, you dumb ass!" (80).

No environment could be less conducive to forming an independent sense of identity. Lorin has given himself completely to the dogma, and Lisa pleads with him, "Listen, I don't have any trouble with the gold plates and the angels and stuff. But you're only human, for God's sake. Can't you believe it and still be normal?" It seems Lisa has asked a good question.

If by "normal," Lisa means "autonomous," indeed Lorin can't be normal, since a mission requires a high degree of subordination of individuality. In focusing on the "mysteries" of the gospel instead of "party-line" aspects, Lorin has made himself suspect, and the forces that prompt him to conform are very powerful.<sup>10</sup>

After the excommunication, Lorin returns briefly to Randolph, Utah, and then sets off for Southern California anew. In this last section of the novel, Lorin is crippled by the trauma of his experience. Lorin went on his mission in the first place as a kind of refugee. His social and emotional selves had failed in the first section of the novel, and he had turned to the mission for relief, willingly turning his life over to the mission's programs. However, he had found the mission too restrictive; and now he returns to the old situation, more crippled than he had been in the first place. Malcolm describes this cycle from dissociated loneliness, to group affiliation and failure within the group, and back to the now intensified loneliness:

*It is apparent, then, that group affiliation, and subjection to the values upheld by these groups, is necessary for almost everyone. It is every bit as apparent, however, that attachment to the group re-*

*quires the individual to espouse certain common beliefs, values, and sentiments, if he is to support the group and be supported by it. In short, he must give up at least some of his individuality. He must conform. Should he fail to do this he will be regarded as deviant by the group, and face the threat of ostracism and a forcible return to that state of disequilibrium and loneliness that caused him to join the group in the first place. Groups are essential and ubiquitous, and they most certainly do have a tendency to command loyalty and obedience. It is not that this is necessarily evil. In fact, quite the opposite is usually the case. Unfortunately the group has a potential to produce blind loyalty, abject submission, and total obedience, and such conditions have invariably been dehumanizing in the end.<sup>11</sup>*

In the final section of the novel, the conflicted aspects of Lorin's ambivalence bring about an almost literal disintegration of Lorin's developing sense of self. On the one hand, Lorin loves his Mormon culture, his family, and his God. On the other, Lorin recognizes that he cannot function in this closed system of values. He is intellectually able to understand profound complexities; he is honestly—if sometimes excessively—sexual; and most of all, he recognizes that the rigidity of the sense of identity that his mission has developed in him simply is not workable. Lorin feels his self split into two crippled selves, one of which lies naked in bed eating potato chips, the other of which goes on a walk. Fisher leaves it tantalizingly unclear which is the true self and which the hallucinated self—or if indeed both are hallucinated. At any rate, Lorin narrowly escapes a complete emotional breakdown or insanity. The final scenes of the novel show Lorin moving more healthily into a secular world, on the road to a more workable, less rigid sense of self.

A friend recently told me of a speech he had heard Chaim Potok give at USC several years ago. Potok allegedly said that he targeted his novels at young people who grow up in what he termed "a closed system of values" like that of Orthodox Judaism (and presumably Mormonism). After reaching adulthood, Potok said, these young people find themselves in "an open system of values." One need only think of Potok's protagonists who, after hav-

ing grown up in Hasidic homes and neighborhoods, find themselves confronted with Freudianism and nuclear weaponry. His goal, Potok said, was to help these young people make a smooth transition from the orthodox to the secular system and to somehow attain a harmonious reconciliation of the two.

By calling its youth on missions, the Church firmly entrenches the closed system of values in its young people before turning them loose in the world.<sup>12</sup> For me, Fisher's novel is a reminder of my own turbulent adolescence, both the hazards and joys of my mission, and the painful readjustments I had to make upon returning home. His novel helps me to reconcile my own conflicting systems of values.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Joe Peterson delivered this paper at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 26 January 1991 at Westminster College in Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup>Segal, *Joseph Campbell: An Introduction* (New York: Penguin Book Co., 1989), 33-37.

<sup>3</sup>Franklin Fisher, *Bones* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990). Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>4</sup>Irving Howe, in his autobiography, tells how he willingly delivered himself to a radical political movement—perhaps an ironic corollary. Along with other teenagers, Howe felt that the Trotskyist Movement gave him "the sense that we had gained not merely a purpose but a coherent perspective upon everything in the world," resulting in a kind of euphoria: "Never before or since had we lived at so high, so intense a pitch, been so absorbed in ideas beyond the smallness of self." In effect, Howe escaped the turbulence of late adolescence by focusing on issues he considered more important than his own sense of self. Quoted in "A Liberal Spirit," review of *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography* in *New Republic*, 1 November 1982.

<sup>5</sup>Malcolm, *The Tyranny of the Group* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1975), 4.

<sup>6</sup>From Scott D. Miller, "Thought Reform and Totalism: The Psychology of the LDS Church Missionary Training Programs," unpublished paper dated 31 July 1983. Both brainwashing in Red China and "thought reform" in the MTC are techniques containing the following eight elements: "milieu control" (in which rules govern all aspects of the missionary's life including all communication with the outside world), "mystical manipulation" (in which missionary success and failure is linked to mystical causes like obedience and purity of thought), "demand for purity," (in which leaders, "by defining and manipulating the criteria for purity, and then by conducting an all-out war upon impurity, . . . create a narrow world of [individual] guilt and shame"), "personal confession" (in which all infractions of a strict code be confessed to some authority, and "artificial" sinful-

ness" may even be induced by an "overregulated missionary environment"), the acceptance of basic group dogma as sacred, the "loading" of the language (in which intellectually complicated issues are suppressed with "thought-terminating cliché[s]," the subordination of person to doctrine (in which the individual is required to give up personal views and accept group views), and finally "the dispensing of existence" (in which "meaningful existence is equated with acceptance of group dogma").

<sup>7</sup>All three statements are quoted in Kenneth L. Woodward, "Onward, Mormon Soldiers," *Newsweek*, 27 April 1981, 87-88.

<sup>8</sup>As quoted in *ibid.*, Additionally, I've always thought the terms "set apart as a missionary" implies more than separating the young person from his normal late adolescent friends who haven't been "chosen." Additionally, it seems to me, the terms imply an active kind of manipulation on the part of the Church. "Set apart" in this regard approaches "taken over."

<sup>9</sup>As quoted in *ibid.*, 87.

<sup>10</sup>Malcolm, *The Tyranny of the Group*, 5, explains: "The more cohesive a group is, the more desire there will be to conform and encourage potentially deviant members to accept the group standards. . . . The groups that condemn deviation most vigorously are those based on irrational beliefs and, for this reason, are especially cohesive. In such groups intense pressure will be brought to bear on the suspected deviant; but when every effort to recover the straying member fails, he is rejected with the same energy that was invested in the campaign for his salvation. His expulsion will be as vehement and passionate as the failed rescue mission."

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 4; italics mine.

<sup>12</sup>Indeed, one of Woodward's main points was that the purpose of the missionary system may really be to make "committed" members of the Church out of the missionaries instead of to convert non-Mormons.

# Letters from Exile: Plural Marriage from the Perspective of Martha Hughes Cannon

John Sillito and Constance L. Lieber<sup>1</sup>

*Oh dear, Oh dear!! If we ever live through this present strait, I trust we will be "wiser and better men" and women. I grow heartily sick & disgusted with it. Polygamy in these days reminds me of Bishop [Edward] Hunter's polygamy in the days of Nauvoo. He remarked, "Polygamy in the days of Nauvoo—law, law, law!! Don't talk about it. Law! Law! Law! Don't talk about it."*<sup>2</sup>

S O BEGINS A LETTER to Angus Cannon from his fourth plural wife, Martha Maria Paul Hughes. Martha was twenty-seven years old in 1884 when she married Angus Munn Cannon who was fifty. A graduate of the University of Michigan Medical School in 1880, and the University of Pennsylvania and the National School for Elocution and Oratory in 1882, "Mattie," as she was known to friends and family, was an intelligent, articulate woman, who brought a wealth of knowledge and experience into her marriage that was uncommon for her time and that colored her life and that of her husband and children.

At the time she wrote the above letter, Mattie and her five-month-old daughter, Elizabeth Rachel, were hiding from federal marshals at the Centerville home of John W. Woolley, making final preparations for a self-imposed trip into exile in England. Of this time she later wrote to her husband, "were it all written or told—(either would be an impossibility)—it would make as thrilling a tale as ever appeared on the pages of fiction."<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, Mattie is right. Plural marriage has been a central theme in Mormon letters both on the "pages of fiction" and in works of history as well. Indeed, in the past decade, a part of what has been labelled the new Mormon history consists of a large body of scholarship reinterpreting and reassessing the nature of plural marriage. This effort has been

tied in part to the work of a number of historians of Mormon women, many of them women themselves, who seek to place the story of plural marriage into proper historical perspective, while simultaneously shaping our understanding of the practice in light of contemporary attitudes on marriage, sexuality, patriarchy, and political equality. Some observers of plural marriage have viewed it as a liberating force allowing women extraordinary opportunities to grow and develop. At times Mattie saw it that way. Others have seen plural marriage as the hallmark of oppressive patriarchy at its most extreme—circumscribing and stunting women. The truth may lie somewhere in between. In any case, the more information we have about plural marriage, and its operation in real situations as opposed to theoretical, the better we will be able to understand its place in the Mormon experience.

Over several years, we worked at editing a collection of the letters between Mattie and Angus while Mattie was in her self-imposed exile in England. This collection, *Letters From Exile: The Correspondence of Angus M. and Martha Hughes Cannon*, was published by Signature Books in December 1989. We believe it constitutes a view of one particular polygamous marriage, and the ways in which two people balanced the demands of a marital arrangement that was difficult at best, particularly while separated by several thousand miles.

Mattie's decision to go into hiding was the result of a campaign on the part of the federal government to prosecute Mormon polygamists. In a series of legislative measures passed between 1862 and 1887, the government specifically sought to outlaw plural marriage and provide penalties for its practice, including fines, prison terms and political

disenfranchisement. In 1887, the Edmunds-Tucker Act was passed, which sought to ultimately destroy the LDS Church as a political and economic entity. Among other things, the law required plural wives to testify against their husbands. This series of legal measures (enhanced by the efforts of Protestant groups in opposing Mormon polygamy) ushered in a period of repression known as "the raid."

Consequently, by the late 1880s, federal opposition to plural marriage was a major fact of Utah life. Not only were husbands fleeing federal marshals, but wives and children were either forced to flee themselves, or live through "long periods of deprivation and fear."<sup>4</sup> Marriages were disrupted and people's lives were altered dramatically.

Among those closely watched and ultimately prosecuted by federal marshals was Angus M. Cannon, then serving as Salt Lake Stake president. As warrants were often issued for his arrest, Angus spent much time on the "underground," aided by his large family and associates. As his plural wife, named in some of the warrants, Mattie faced two choices—to remain underground in Utah or a neighboring area, or to go into exile.

As early as 1885, Mattie, then resident physician at the Deseret Hospital in Salt Lake City, married just five months and already pregnant with her first child, knew her situation would ultimately have to change. She wrote to an old school friend, Barbara Replogle:

*The City of the Saints [is] more like the City of Desolation now-a-days as the persecution that is going on against the polygamists is almost unendurable. The U.S. is determined to put down polygamy. . . . I am having no peace, because I am considered a leading Mormon Woman.<sup>5</sup>*

On 10 January 1885, Angus was served with a warrant for his arrest on the complaint that for more than ten years he had "continuously lived and cohabited with more than one woman." Eventually, he was convicted of "lascivious cohabitation" with Amanda Mousley Cannon and Clara Valentine Mason, and sentenced on 13 May to six months' imprisonment and a \$300 fine.

When Mattie first approached Angus with her plan to take Elizabeth and go into exile, he was heartsick. He wrote in his diary "I am told [a] friend wants to go to England and I consent. . . . I leave her tonight with the saddest heart I ever felt."<sup>6</sup> Yet, Mattie must have felt a sense of relief ("Let me off then I'll be happy" she wrote Angus from hiding in Centerville)<sup>7</sup> at leaving the worsening persecution of the polygamists in Utah behind, combined with the sense of adventure and anticipation that is reflected in the early letters.

Mattie left New York in high spirits: "Everything is lovely, and the goose hangs high!"<sup>8</sup> Mattie and Elizabeth landed at Liverpool on 1 May 1886 and began an exile that lasted for two years. For part of that time, Mattie enjoyed the company of Angus's son Lewis who was serving on a mission. Lewis, who was Mattie's contemporary and shared her zest for life, provided a link with home, yet also poignantly reminded her that she was married to a man nearly twice her age and who had five other intimate companions of his own.

Mattie's early letters to Angus show a determination to keep up with matters at home and reveal a lot about her nature. She had access to the *Deseret News* and the *Millennial Star*, a publication of the British Mission. She also bombarded Angus with questions and offered him her opinions. She seemed especially concerned with the activities of two prominent women of her day—Emmeline B. Wells and Romania Pratt Penrose. Emmeline was the editor of the *Woman's Exponent*, where Mattie was employed before going to medical school. Emmeline was also on the Board of Directors of the Deseret Hospital, where Mattie was resident physician from 1885, and the two were assumed to be friends. Yet the tone of Mattie's letters when writing of Emmeline is sarcastic and exhibits a tinge of jealousy toward the older woman.

Of Romania Pratt Penrose she wrote:

*I tell you notwithstanding we both are considered tolerable good saints, there is an internal antipathy existing between we two women, which only slumbers while I am in seclusion but will 'erupt' when I begin to jostle in the medical field again.<sup>9</sup>*



Again Mattie was probably jealous. Romania Penrose was practicing medicine openly at "her" Deseret Hospital (Mattie wrote acidly) and Emmeline B. Wells was active in politics and journalism. But Mattie was stuck in a little country village with an often-ill baby, using a pseudonym, sacrificing her career and ambition to keep her husband out of prison, and herself out of the witness box.

It is clear from these letters that Mattie had ambivalent feelings, torn between her own ambition and the desire to sacrifice for the good of her family, upholding her own strong religious convictions. "I glorify God when I think of it—and am willing and glad to submit to His divine behests, whatever degree of human sacrifice it may entail," she wrote Angus.<sup>10</sup>

To Barbara Replogle, Mattie wrote about her ambition, her desire for fame, to "accomplish something more in this life," and her anxiety to return to normalcy and practice medicine and elocution once more. She seemed worried that Barbara would think she was not advancing intellectually, as Barbara, who had become a noted temperance lecturer, was doing.

But to Angus she expressed herself in terms of love or frustration; support and understanding of his position, or weariness of her own; and very often, jealousy of his other wives—especially Maria Bennion whom Angus married as she and Elizabeth departed for England. Mattie's need to be secure in his love is a constant theme. At one point, referring to her status she writes: "Taking the great plan into consideration, a quarter section, ay! even less, is preferable to none at all of your precious self."<sup>11</sup> She wanted to believe Angus, but fought against his assurances: "Perhaps this very moment you are basking in the smiles of your *young* Maria [Bennion]. Well bask and be happy—but remember that your blessed neck is at stake . . . if you ever tell that I am jealous."<sup>12</sup>

On another occasion her remarks were more pointed, chiding Angus for his failure to write weekly letters as they had agreed:

*Your letter of July 30 arrived . . . wherein you suggested writing daily to secure me happiness. . . . I received your statement with a degree of sarcasm when I had just been told [by Lewis] how often you took Mrs. Amelia Young to the theatre, and of how one Hattie Harker got into trouble with one Eddington through promising to go to the theatre with him and then giving him the "slip" to go with you. I know from experience that theatre goers have little time to write. I . . . have plenty of time to write . . . but reasoned thus, that letters were of very little consequence to you, who are pampered with from one to a dozen daily—while to me I thought you might know that a weekly remembrance would assist in relieving the monotony of my life cut off from all other sources of communication.<sup>13</sup>*

Mattie also noted that while Angus might think her "a bit jealous in referring to Sr. Amelia & Hattie," it simply proves that gossip can travel 7000 miles. "Whether jealous or not", she continues, "all I have to say [is] this—every dog has his day!" Mattie concludes by speculating that she isn't sure whether the "two years of prudishness has secured for me any additional favor with the Lord, it isn't the way some of His so called servants do at any rate."<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Mattie also worried that Angus was having to do too much for her, since she could no longer contribute to her support by practicing medicine. "You speak of me giving up all for you. Has it ever occurred to you how much *you* have given up for me? Do you ever think of it?—*I do*—and it sickens me."<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, she resented her forced dependence on Angus for funds. Indeed much of their correspondence is taken up with requests for additional funds.

More fundamental was the ambivalence Mattie felt between understanding and accepting the principle of polygamy intellectually, and understanding and accepting it with her heart. At one point she admonished Angus:

*It is only with great effort that I control myself at times. . . . I . . . have to . . . ask that you repeat not one word of discontent to any living soul especially to your other wives. If it is God's will that I am to pass*

*through a . . . trial that has been prepared for me, I am ready and willing to stand the test, while at the same time my pride would shrink from others gazing at the wounds that may be inflicted. It is the habit of some polygamists to console wives who may complain of lack of attention, on the part of the husband by saying that some other of his wives was complaining of the same thing. There are many tricks in the trade—some not altogether of a high order.*<sup>16</sup>

On still another occasion, she told Barbara, "I have linked my fate with one that I love—one who seems all but perfection in my eyes—but I don't let him know it all—I think it well for a woman to keep a little reserve power in that line."<sup>17</sup> Toward the end of 1886 she scolded Angus for implying that he had deprived her parents of a daughter by marrying her, thus prompting her exile with the words,

*If their real feelings were analyzed, I'll warrant that they realized that they have not only not lost a daughter in any sense, but have gained a son, one of the noblest in the world, by our union, and I assure you it has made me one of the happiest little wives and mothers in creation. It's truth.*<sup>18</sup>

Yet just a few weeks later she complained to Angus:

*I do have quite a fight with myself at times. I do not wish to kick over the traces . . . nor have I any inclination to simmer down into an imbecilic resignation . . . when a woman once gives herself up to wifehood and maternity, it means everything to her and there is an inherent principle within her that is stung to the quick when her rights as wife and mother are curtailed, obscured, or burlesqued from whatever cause.*<sup>19</sup>

Yet her allegiance to the faith also enabled her to add, "But the knowledge that it is God's plan to prove them is the only thing that saves [me and others] from despair—almost madness I fear."<sup>20</sup>

As her exile continued, Mattie's letters changed in feeling from her early ones. The letters are often full of pain, jealousy, loneliness, and depression, lacking any of the usual wry "good-humor in spite of trials" which enlivened earlier letters. In one letter she told Angus: "Were it not for [Elizabeth]

and the religion of our God I should never want to see Salt Lake again, but seek some other spot and strive to forget what a failure my life has been."<sup>21</sup> Angus responded by telling Mattie her depression could "not be wondered at as you have endured your exile better than I could have expected to do, under altogether more favorable circumstances."<sup>22</sup>

Finally the days of exile ended. Mattie left Liverpool for the United States on 2 December 1887 on the *Arizona* and enjoyed an all-too-brief interlude with Angus in New York before continuing on the final part of her exile in Michigan. The last letters, written in 1888 from Algonac and Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Chicago are more straightforward, laced with some sarcasm and jealousy, but with little of the quotations and introspection characteristic of the bulk of the correspondence. They are the letters of a woman who knows that she is on her way home. She reminisced of an earlier, happier time from her student "girlhood days" and described "my beautiful St. Clair of years gone—which I always then saw in its summer loveliness. 'Twas here I used to compose love letters and dream . . . of fame and happiness in years to come."<sup>23</sup>

Mattie arrived in Salt Lake City in late May 1888, taking up residence with her mother and stepfather. It was a difficult time because nothing was the same, yet in a sense her exile continued. As she wrote Barbara Replogle:

*I am busy with practice but have no office or home yet. Am simply staying at my step-father's residence. 'Tis a fact that all my relatives understand me even less than yours do you. So you may realize my situation to an extent my anticipations of happy associations with loved ones after my long exile were altogether overdrawn, which is often the case with imaginative natures—and I find myself already simply enduring one of the veriest practical proxy of lives which is the driest chaff imaginable to a susceptible nature.*<sup>24</sup>

After Mattie's return, she started a private medical practice, teaching classes in nursing and lecturing on obstetrics. In the next two decades, however, she was best known for her political and governmental activity. In 1896, she was elected to the

Utah State Senate, the first woman to win such an office in U.S. history. Mattie ran as a Democrat for one of several at-large seats. Among the Republican candidates for the same office was her husband, Angus, who was not elected. Angus continued to serve as president of the Salt Lake Stake until 1904 when the stake was divided into four—Salt Lake, Liberty, Ensign, and Pioneer—and Angus was released. Later Angus was called to serve as Salt Lake Stake patriarch, an office he held until his death in Salt Lake City on 7 June 1915.

In later years, Mattie and Angus—both dynamic, strong willed, prominent members of the community, were unable to live together as married couples usually do. Their correspondence reveals a stormy relationship, yet not devoid of affection. After her return from exile, Mattie and Angus had two other children—James Hughes Cannon in 1890 and Gwendolyn Quick Cannon in 1899. In 1904, Mattie and the children moved temporarily to California because of health considerations. Mattie eventually settled permanently in Los Angeles to be near her children who were living there and died 10 July 1932.

As indicated earlier, it is important that we continually seek to increase our understanding of plural marriage and its place in the Mormon experience. The letters between Mattie and Angus are valuable documents in illuminating the practice of plural marriage, at least as it operated in one particular marriage. At the same time it is important to broaden those insights to speculate about plural marriage generally, even given the inherent difficulty of interpreting the past in the light of present attitudes. Such a task represents a significant challenge. As Arthur Schlesinger commented: in an article in the *New York Review of Books*:

*As new preoccupations seize historians in the present we discern new possibilities in the past. In this sense the present persistently re-creates the past. . . . The perspective of 1990 is bound to be different from that of 1940. So, one may be sure, will be the perspective of 2040.<sup>25</sup>*

We recognize both limitations and challenges in the perceptions regarding plural marriage arising

from the experiences of Mattie and Angus. In the first place, the practice of plural marriage by its very nature was obviously and inherently unequal. For Mattie it meant exile in the name of protecting her husband from federal persecution. Angus, though he was imprisoned for a short time and lived on the underground, operated in a much freer day-to-day existence. Not only was he able to enjoy the company of his wives and family, but he found time to contract two more plural marriages and continued courting other young women. Mattie on the other hand, found herself isolated from friends and family, living alone in a foreign land with a young and often sickly daughter, and viewed with suspicion by her neighbors. What was this woman doing in England with a young daughter and only a vague explanation for her husband's absence? For Mattie exile truly was isolation. One suspects that had Angus been exiled in England, he, if nothing else, would have married additional wives. Obviously such an opportunity in polyandry did not exist for Mattie.

At the same time, Mattie struggled with the dilemma of accepting polygamy because it was a commandment, though it lacked the intimacy and sharing that we so routinely associate with marriage. Yet it should also be recognized that because of Angus's relative affluence, she was able to enjoy many benefits not available to other plural wives who spent their "exile" on the rustic fringes of the Great Basin Kingdom.

In addition to her personal isolation, Mattie clearly sacrificed her career in medicine by going into exile. Despite her brave intentions, she was never able to practice, study, or visit medical facilities in England or on the Continent, nor keep current on medical issues. Angus, on the other hand, continued his business and ecclesiastical callings with only minor inconveniences.

Finally, once Mattie returned to Utah she found herself in the same limbo as when she left. On the one hand, she was not recognized as a legal wife and still threatened by arrest. On the other hand, she could not command the intimacy she craved in married life, neither was she single and free to form other alliances.

Those of us interested in the scope of Mormon letters are left with a challenging task. As we seek to "persistently re-create the past" in our capacities as historians, prose writers, or critics, let us remember that plural marriage was a complex and contradictory experience as well as a compelling human drama from the Mormon past.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>John R. Sillito is archivist and curator of Special Collections at Weber State University. Constance L. Leiber is a graduate in American history from the University of Utah. She is currently living and writing in Switzerland. Sillito and Lieber are currently working on a biography of Martha Hughes Cannon. This paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters 27 January 1990, Westminster College of Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup>Martha Hughes Cannon to Angus M. Cannon, [March] 1886, Angus M. Cannon Papers (hereafter cited as AMC Papers); Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

<sup>3</sup>3 May 1888, AMC Papers.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>MHC to Barbara Replogle, 1 May 1885, Martha Hughes Cannon Collection (hereafter cited as MHC Collection), LDS Church Archives.

<sup>6</sup>Angus M. Cannon, Diary, 23 March 1886, AMC Papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>7</sup>MHC to AMC, 6 March 1886, AMC Papers.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 20 April 1886.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 30 July 1886.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1 November 1886.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 20 May 1886.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 29 May 1886.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 22 August 1887.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. This comment was included as a postscript to Mattie's letter to Angus of 20 August.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 9 July 1886.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 22 August 1887.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 6 August 1887.

<sup>18</sup>MHC to AMC, 4 September 1886, AMC Papers.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 18 October 1886.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 3 November 1887.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 6 October 1887.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 5 February 1888.

<sup>24</sup>MHC to Barbara Replogle, 10 August 1888, MHC Collection.

<sup>25</sup>Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "The Ages of Jackson," *New York Review of Books*, 7 December 1989, 51.

the massacre. Perhaps it is simply a mistaken assumption that the readers' depth of knowledge is sufficient to make the same connections she already had.<sup>8</sup>

For example, Brooks relates a story about a John Lawson and his son-in-law, George Dodds, who trespassed on the Lee property two days in a row and took the flagrant liberty of chopping out the growth of young trees along the ditch bank. Lee confronted them the first day, chasing them off with some mutual gun-waving, but the trespassers returned the very next day when Emma and another wife, Ann, were alone on the place. After a violent and oddly humorous attack on the men with pans of hot water, Lawson and Dodds retreated and filed a complaint against the Lee wives for assault and battery. The men of the city voted in the Lee family's favor, ruling,

*that John Lawson pay a fine of \$25 & the cost of the suit & that Bro. John D. Lee . . . was justified in defending his private rights, and . . . & that he could not have had any other Motiv in view than to kick up a row with Bro. Lee (31).*

Brooks's explanation goes no further. This incident may have been the result of personal antagonism between the families, or perhaps Lawson was a troublemaker to begin with. But in light of the unique social predicament the Lees were in, the occurrence needs to be interpreted by a broader context. This need increases as we look at other, similar incidents that are used as evidence of growing hostility toward Lee and his family. Earlier in Brooks's narrative, Lee receives a threatening letter demanding that he "make [his] escape or [he] should be hung up in that old Fort Harmony for being in the Mountain Meadows Massacre" (26). Emma Lee, in response, accused a George Hicks of fabricating the letter, and a bishop's court felt there was enough evidence to dismiss Hicks's counter-accusation of "unChristianlike behavior" (27). Apparently Hicks had harassed the Lees on several prior occasions, often enough to make the court sympathetic to Emma's current suspicions.

Later, after Lee's official excommunication, Brooks cites other encounters with predatory neighbors. A man's excommunication from the Church meant that his property was open to plunder, and Lee suffered substantial losses as he tried to move Emma and Rachel and their children to the Arizona border, in accordance with Brigham Young's "call" that sent him to the outer fringes of habitable territory (34). Jacob Hamblin and other Church members are mentioned intermittently for antagonizing Lee and his families in some way or another; at one time Hamblin actually confiscated the ferry Lee had deeded to Emma before he was imprisoned to insure her livelihood at Lonely Dell (83). Hamblin used the proceeds for his own benefit, until Brigham Young ordered him to return it.

But in spite of these and other intriguing details of John D.'s and Emma's lives, the reader is left with a spotty, ambiguous picture of Emma's personal reactions and attitudes. Most surprisingly, Brooks mentions John D.'s excommunication only in passing, without so much as a speculative reference toward Emma's response:

*What they [the Lees] did not know was that their husband and father had been officially excommunicated from the Church on 8 Oct. 1870. He did not receive the notice himself until November 18 (32).*

Brooks's next paragraph details continuing work on Lee's sawmill and its caprices.

There is a similar silence about Emma's activities and responses during Lee's imprisonment in Beaver and later in Salt Lake City, although Brooks does give us one particularly colorful, character-revealing incident at the jail in Beaver. When she arrived, she heard one of the guards ask, "Who is that handsome woman?" "Just one of John D. Lee's whores," the other guard answered. Emma responded "quick as a lightning flash" by striking him twice across the face with her buggy whip. The guard dodged the third blow and ran (79). Here we have a marvelous glimpse of Emma's temperament and frontier self-sufficiency, but it still gives us little of her response to the deeper issues—how an intelligent, strong-willed woman dealt with the abuses of

a hostile society, or how a believing member of the Mormon Church reconciled the pain and paradox of gross injustice among the people for whom she had sacrificed so much.

The climactic end of John D. Lee's tragic life—his execution at Mountain Meadows after his belated conviction as the sole perpetrator of the massacre—is not mentioned at all in Emma's biography. The only allusion to it comes after an enormous jump from John D.'s imprisonment and conviction to Emma's forced move from Lonely Dell. Emma wakes from a disturbing dream, after which Brooks muses for her: "If John D. Lee were here he would have figured some portent or meaning to it all. But John was gone, and she felt almost a relief that at last he was beyond the power of evil men to harass him further" (93).

Emma's subsequent move from Lonely Dell and her marriage to Frank French (94), apparently a non-Mormon, seem disconcertingly casual in the vacuum of unexplored response and emotion. The despicable behavior of Church authorities in cheating her out of the ferry and other Lonely Dell property (96) passes with uncharacteristically little analysis or contextual detail from the author. The final tragedies of Emma's life, especially the suicide of her youngest daughter, Victoria (98), are shocking, especially since Brooks ties Victoria's death directly to the social stigma suffered by the family; yet previous information has not prepared the reader for full understanding or sympathy. After a one-paragraph treatment of the suicide, Brooks goes on with a lineal history of Lee descendants.

Emma Lee French dies soon after, supposedly loved and respected by the same community that helped drive Victoria to kill herself. Of the social pressures on Emma, due to her former marriage, we are given little clue.

Levi Peterson refers to the Mountain Meadows Massacre and John D. Lee's part in it as "the story [Juanita Brooks] was born to write."<sup>9</sup> Certainly the works dealing specifically with this subject are Brooks's finest. By 1975, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), *A Mormon Chronicle: the Diaries of John D.*

*Lee, 1848-1876*, edited and annotated by Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, 2 vols. (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1955), and Brooks's biography of Lee had been published for several years. Possibly, another undertaking of the same size seemed overwhelming to Brooks. And, when we consider the limited amount of primary documentation pertaining directly to Emma herself, we must sympathize with Brooks's apparent reluctance to retell the same story once more, with only slight and speculative changes in point of view. The gaps in events, responses, and personality are actually those which a novelist, not a historian, might fill.

Although she uses many of the techniques of a fiction writer, including foreshadowing, dialogue, and plot structure in several of her works, Juanita Brooks is primarily a historian, and her integrity as such does not allow her to fill the spaces that must have been inviting to an imaginative and sympathetic mind like hers. And so, in *Emma Lee*, she is left with the sparse, scattered documents that chronicle a real human life, a pioneer woman inextricably tied to the rich and controversial personality of her husband, John D. Lee, yet independent and admirable in her own right.

Who was Emma Batchelor Lee French, then, beyond the wife of the man for whom she gave up her name and ultimately her social standing? Brooks gives us a few remarkable glimpses, in spite of the relative scarcity of her sources. We have already seen some of Emma's temper in her confrontations with Lawson, Hicks, and the Beaver Jail guards. Yet anger was only one manifestation of a vital and determined spirit. As a single, twenty-one-year-old woman, recently converted to the Mormon Church, she and her friend Elizabeth Summers emigrated from England to America (2). Emma's enthusiasm to reach "Zion" was one of the influences that persuaded the leaders of the Martin Company to begin the late-summer trek across the continent. The misery of the Martin Company's winter encounters are legendary in Mormon pioneer history. At least 150 of the company died of exposure or starvation; many more lost fingers, toes, noses, ears, or limbs to frostbite. Emma was one of the few who

suffered no such losses, though she crossed the freezing rivers on the trail several times each to help others weaker than herself (3). The trip was a trauma with long-lasting effects, certainly equal in impact to the many other trials she faced in later years. Brooks's literary instinct heightens the dramatic power of the Martin trek by bringing it to Emma's memory and conversation in the midst of another painful, but more happy, ordeal; Emma remembers it for a sister wife who is helping her through the birth of her daughter, Frances Dell (46).

It is in such references to childbirth and rearing, homemaking, and feminine relationships that Brooks is able to recreate a world mostly unreachable in her histories of men. Life on the desert was different for women than it was for men. An encounter with Indians, for example, had very different implications for a woman alone on an isolated homestead than for a man in any setting. Emma's night with an Indian band shows a type of initiative her husband would never have had to muster. Brooks's description here is vivid and admiring. At one point, Emma was living at Lonely Dell on the Colorado River, miles from any other settlers, and alone with her children, as she often was for months at a time. One night, alone with her children, she watched an Indian band make camp at her corral, only a short distance from the house. They seemed restless and unsettled. Brooks communicates feminine terror, faith, and courage in one short description:

*Emma fed [the children] a good supper, telling herself that it is easier to be brave if you are not hungry, yet try as she would, she couldn't help watching from the window. The Indians were walking about; their campfire was not a big one, and she could not tell if there was preparation of food going on. What could she do? She had only one direction to turn. So she called all the children together for their evening prayer. Always they said an evening prayer, but this was different. She prayed earnestly for guidance, for inspiration to know what to do. She got to her feet with her mind made up. (61)*

Emma told the children that they were going to sleep at the Indian camp. She herded them down to the group and addressed the chief, explaining that she was alone and scared. Would he protect them overnight? The chief was startled but signaled to several braves to make room. Emma intended to stay awake and watch all night, but the fatigue of pregnancy and of the previous day's labor overtook her. She woke the next morning to an empty site and sat up to see the Indians passing single file down the trail toward Kanab (70).

Such an event would have been entirely different in emotional weight had a white man been present. Through Emma, Brooks gives us a pioneer adventure that could not happen in the narratives of John D. Lee, Hosea Stout, or any other man.

Through Emma, we also are given a feminine look at polygamy. After marrying Emma, his seventeenth wife, John D.'s life went on with little change. It was Emma who had to adjust, not only to the traditional changes that marriage brings, but also to becoming part of an enormous, already established household. She shared her first married bedroom not with her husband, but with another young wife, Mary Ann Williams (8). Emma assumed her place in the domestic routine as a skilled cooking and kitchen specialist, but her first encounter with the entire John D. Lee household was quite a shock, as Brooks helps us discover:

*Here were seven mothers, each with at least two children, all living within the fort or nearby in the village. The wives ranged in age from Agatha, who was forty-four, down to Mary Leah Groves, who was twenty-two, just as Emma was. Then there was Mary Ann just past sixteen, who was not yet a wife in fact. As for the children, Alma was eighteen, Joseph fourteen, and Willard nine—then there were seventeen little ones eight years old and younger. Add to these James Thompson, Lem, the Indian boy, and Charlie Fancher all about ten years old, and you have a total of twenty-three children in the household, and every one present at the meeting, sitting on chairs, on benches, or on the floor.<sup>10</sup>*

Emma had early become acquainted with part of John D.'s family. On her first "date" with him, in Salt Lake City, John D. took her to visit his oldest daughter, now married, Sarah Jane Lee Dalton. He took them out on the town, treating them to cookies and ice cream, then bought them both pretty shawls and handkerchiefs (5). Emma and Sarah Jane were instant friends, an affinity that seems odd to us, trying to imagine a twentieth-century scenario in which the daughter of two living, married parents would help her father attract an additional wife.

Emma's own turn at being a veteran wife came soon afterward when John D. married Teresa Morse (12), a mature woman with children of her own. Brooks gives a brief but significant description, not entirely free of her own projected feelings:

*For a time Emma had to share her quarters with Teresa, but she resolved not to be jealous of anyone but just to keep a place in her husband's heart that would be all her own, by putting his welfare before everything else, serving meals that he could be proud of and maintaining a haven to which he could come whenever he was weary or discouraged. (12)*

Apparently Emma succeeded. Brooks praised her in the next paragraph: "She was skilled in all the household arts; she was energetic and resourceful, so that her name runs like a bright threat [sic] through all [John D.'s] writing" (12).

Emma Lee as resurrected by Juanita Brooks is sometimes little more than a specter, especially in places where original records yield little more than a date, a note, or a safe assumption. Brooks was always fascinated by the realities—the thoughts, quirks, and distinctive personalities of her subjects. Thus, she must have been in many places as disappointed as we are by the gaps in the reconstructible lives of the vibrant women in Utah history. Yet, from what she was able to retrieve emerge titillating glimpses of reality beyond the bright myths we have created around our ancestors. They are sometimes shocking in their revelation of fallible humanity but ultimately affirmative and nourishing in their chronicle of struggle, complexity, and transcendence. And in spite of their relative scarcity, the

women who appear in any of Brooks's writings bring a dimension and compassion that fill the author's demand for completeness and objectivity.

In *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, we are told of aggression, vengeance, hierarchical and patriarchal authority, shock, remorse, initial terror of retribution, and legal guilt in regard to the incident. But it is with the entrance of two women, young wives of Jacob Hamblin and Samuel Knight, that we begin to see the full emotional and human horror of the incident. Samuel Knight had brought his wife to Rachel Hamblin for help in delivering a baby. Knight came back after the massacre with blood on his clothes and several crying children, one tiny girl with her arm nearly shot off at the elbow from a stray bullet. Knight's wife was so horrified that she "had a nervous collapse from which she did not recover for a long time" (74).

Another of Hamblin's wives, married to him recently after the massacre, saw the site of the event one night in spite of her husband's attempts to shield her from it. Brooks highlights gender again to add to the impact: "To the end of her days, Priscilla was haunted by that sight of putrefying, dismembered women's bodies."<sup>11</sup>

Yet Brooks refuses to allow the pathos of innocent women and children in the massacre to go beyond its appropriate limits. Legends that sprang up during the trial of John D. Lee accused him of much more heinous crimes than those of which he was actually guilty. One said he had raped two young girls either before or after slitting their throats. Brooks shows the ludicrousness of such a possibility under the circumstances, and adds:

*In fact, the whole suggestion of rape in this incident seems to be another example of how repeated suggestion and whisperings may grow into more and more impossible tales, which are then passed on as fact.<sup>12</sup>*

Brooks was not interested in "suggestions and whisperings," and she did not indulge in them even when they may have filled the dramatic and emotional gaps in her historical reconstructions. She was able to create emotion and humanity in her works by carefully probing every documentable ac-



count and event. In *Emma Lee*, she tells what she can of the story of a pioneer woman, giving her credibility and dignity as a human being beyond the life and influence of her husband. In articles and journals, she pieces together the nearly forgotten histories of women gone with the open desert. And in her finest works—chronicles of the Mormon movement from Illinois and Missouri to the Utah territory, events of the Mormon Battalion, colonization in the desert, transcendent faith and sickening errors—she gives the women a voice and influence in what might only have been recorded as an overpoweringly patriarchal society.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Karin Anderson England received her B.A. in English from Utah State University, her M.A. in English from Brigham Young University, and currently teaches on the English faculty at Utah Valley Community College in Provo. She and her husband Mark are the parents of Amelia and Christian, who were joined by a third sibling in April 1993. This paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, January 1989, at Weber State University, Ogden, Utah.

<sup>2</sup>Levi S. Peterson, *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>*Emma Lee*, Western Text Society Series (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1975). Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>4</sup>"Jest a-copyin'—Word Fr Word." *Utah Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (Fall 1969): 376, 383.

<sup>5</sup>Available on microfilm; photomechanical reprint of *Mormonism Unveiled, or The Life and Confessions of The Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee*, 1880 ed (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Company, 1964).

<sup>6</sup>Charles S. Peterson, "Introduction: Juanita Brooks, Unadored Realist," in Juanita Brooks, *Emma Lee* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1984 edition), 9.

<sup>7</sup>*John D. Lee: Zealot, Pioneer Builder, Scapegoat* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1961), 230.

<sup>8</sup>It is important to note that, by 1975 when *Emma Lee* was published, Juanita Brooks had probably begun to suffer the effects of the progressive senility which eventually claimed her mind. Although Levi Peterson does not directly discuss the effects of this condition on the production of *Emma Lee*, he describes her medical condition immediately afterward. *Juanita Brooks*, 400. Brooks resumed work on *Quicksand and Cactus* and edited *Not by Bread Alone: The Journal of Martha Spence Heywood, 1850-56* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1978) soon afterward. She was certainly hindered by the growing distractions and forgetfulness of her disability from that point on. Linda Speth, director of the Utah State University Press in 1978, hired Charles Peterson to write an introductory

essay to the second (1984) edition of *Emma Lee* and to help Brooks edit and revise the first edition. In spite of the uncharacteristics sloppiness of the text, Charles Peterson praised Brooks for her refusal to succumb to the missionary zeal of most Mormon historians or the romanticizing of the national ones. Levi Peterson, *Juanita Brooks*, 419.

<sup>9</sup>*Juanita Brooks*, 173.

<sup>10</sup>Brooks, *John D. Lee*, 234.

<sup>11</sup>Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, 42-43 note).

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

# In Hims of Praise: The Songs of Zion

Jean Anne Waterstradt<sup>1</sup>

THE YEAR 1985 MARKED the appearance of a new LDS hymnal, which was many years and at least two major committees in the making. *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*<sup>2</sup> is significantly different from and superior to its 1950 predecessor. Briefly, major changes include the following:

1. The new hymnal has seven indexes, four of which are of possible interest to the congregation as a whole—"Authors and Composers," "Scriptures," "Topics" (with 158 listings, including cross-references), and "First Lines and Titles"; three to the music director and organist—"Titles, Tunes, and Meters," "Tune Names," and "Meters."
2. It contains an instructional section, "Using the Hymnbook," which appears of particular value to the less-experienced music director or organist.
3. It contains ninety-two new or partly new hymns.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen of these are borrowed from non-LDS sources, "Faith of Our Fathers" (#84) and "How Great Thou Art" (#86) being prime examples.
4. Seventy hymns in the 1950 hymnal were eliminated.<sup>4</sup> One of the best known of this group is "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." Thirty-six of the omissions carried special designations, such as "Choir," "Women's Chorus," or "Male Chorus."
5. Twenty-seven hymns retained from the 1950 hymnal were given new titles, some of which were simply restorations of old titles.<sup>5</sup> For example, "Oh, How Lovely Was the Morning" is again "Joseph Smith's First Prayer" (#26), and "Ere You Left Your Room This Morning" is once more known as "Did You Think to Pray?" (#140).
6. Scriptural references appear at the end of each hymn.

Several textual changes were also made. Three examples will suffice here. The notorious "you who unto Jesus" in "How Firm a Foundation" (#85) has been altered to "who unto the Savior."<sup>6</sup> The concluding line of "Today, While the Sun Shines" (#229), formerly "there is no tomorrow but only today," now reads, "prepare for tomorrow by working today" because, observes Karen Lynn Davidson, a member of the second hymn-writing committee, "The thought was expressed in a way that might be misunderstood."<sup>7</sup> The original second stanza of "Father, Thy Children to Thee Now Raise" (#91) has been eliminated because it speaks of Utah as a "favored land" and lauds its "fresh'ning breeze and the clear, blue sky." A worldwide church presumably cannot afford these provincial sentiments. According to Davidson, "The Hymnbook Committee felt it preferable to avoid, whenever possible, references within the hymn texts that were too narrow in terms of geography or nationalistic sentiment."<sup>8</sup>

Coexisting with all the strengths of this admirable new hymnal is a lamentable defect—the failure to deal with sexist language. Many years ago Latter-day Saints ceased declaring that Joseph

Smith's blood would long stain Illinois; we now sing that it "shall . . . Plead unto Heav'n" ("Praise to the Man," #27). We no longer swear that Zion will tread on the necks of its foes or that the gentiles "shall bow 'neath thy rod." Nowadays Zion treads without fear of its foes, and the gentiles have disappeared from "O, Ye Mountains High" (#34). We sing instead, "Thy land shall be freedom's abode." We still believe, however, that "the world has need of willing men" ("Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel," #252). Although Davidson points out that in the third stanza of "The Time is Far Spent" (#266) the phrase "Go, brethren" has been changed to "Go forward" in order "to include sisters," the hymnal seems generally unaffected by the increased language sensitivity of the past twenty years. I have been able to find only two other changes "to include sisters," and these alterations were in titles. "Come, All Ye Sons of Zion" is now "Come, All Ye Saints of Zion" (#38), and "O Sons of Zion" has been retitled "O Saints of Zion" (#39), but the hymn itself still contains masculine language.

In studying the language of the new hymnal, I have found, then, unsurprisingly, that its chief offense is its exclusionary nature. The world of the hymnal is predominantly male; the gospel message is too often directed to men, or brothers, or mankind, or the sons of men. As I deal with the question of language, I do not challenge church doctrine, only the thoughtless perpetuation of language that dispossesses women. I have not included the Christmas songs with their traditional wish of "Peace on earth, good will to men" or works labeled for men.

For convenience in organizing this material, I have followed these divisions in the hymnal's Table of Contents:

*Restoration* (1-61)  
*Prayer and Thanksgiving* (62-96)  
*Prayer and Supplication* (97-168)  
*Sacrament* (169-196)  
*Easter* (197-200)  
*Special Topics* (215-298)  
*Children's Songs* (299-308)  
*For Women* (309-318)  
*Patriotic* (338-341).

Of the sixty-one hymns included under "Restoration," nineteen contain exclusionary language, and two contain defamatory references. The texts of sixteen of these twenty-one hymns were written by LDS authors; eighteen were written by men.

"Israel, Israel, God is Calling" (#7) gives Babylon a feminine identity in the biblical tradition: "Babylon the great is falling; / God shall all her tow'rs o'erthrow." "What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?" (#11) speaks twice of the gospel's coming to "men." It also says that "God is just to ev'ry man." "Twas Witnessed in the Morning Sky" (#12) not only announces that the gospel plan is given to "men," but "I Saw a Mighty Angel Fly" (#15) brings the message "To cheer the sons of day." In "Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice" (#21) Christ's people put their trust in the Savior, "not in man." "Now We'll Sing with One Accord" (#25) says that the priesthood is a "blessing unto men" and proclaims that "God's commandments to mankind" have been designed "to bless the seeking mind." It also quotes Christ speaking to a "son." In the refrain of "Praise to the Man" (#27) Joseph Smith is still planning "for his brethren" as he mingles with gods. "Saints, Behold How Great Jehovah" (#28) has "all men" bowing before heaven's king. In "The Happy Day at Last Has Come" (#32), "angels speak again with men." The concluding line of "For the Strength of the Hills" (#35) blesses "our God, our fathers' God."

In "O Saints of Zion" (#39) "all the sons of men" will receive the kingdom. Further, the truth has been revealed to men, as the Saints are entreated to "Tread the paths / Your faithful fathers trod." "Arise, O Glorious Zion" (#40) speaks of bringing the message "To all the sons of men." In emphasizing God's steadfast love, "Zion Stands with Hills Surrounded" (#43) declares that "mothers [may] cease their own to cherish." "We Will Sing of Zion" (#47) looks forward to the time when "men will live in love and peace." In "Glorious Things are Sung of Zion" (#48) all citizens of "Enoch's city seen of old" walk with God and "as himself each loved his neighbor." "Adam-on-di-Ahman" (#49) claims that "man did live a holy race." "Sons of Michael, He Approaches" (#51) anticipates the re-

union of the human family with its primordial parents, Adam (Michael) and Eve. Women, however, are present only in such phrases as "ye thousands" and "thy children's adoration." "Let Earth's Inhabitants Rejoice" (#53) predicts that the time will soon arrive "when man no more with man will strive" and "love to God and man [will] abound." "Behold, the Mountain of the Lord" (#54), based on Isaiah 2:2-5, refers to men beating their swords into plowshares. "Come, Ye Children of the Lord" (#58) looks to Christ's reign, "when all men from sin will cease." The final example in this section, "Battle Hymn of the Republic" (#60), is concerned with "the hearts of men" and with Christ's death "to make men holy" and the lives of dedicated humans "to make men free."

Of the thirty-five hymns listed under "Prayer and Thanksgiving," twelve contain exclusionary language. All twelve texts were written by men; three of the authors are LDS.

"All Creatures of Our God and King" (#62) speaks of the "fire so masterful and bright / That gives to man both warmth and light." In "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" (#69) "mortal men and all things / Created make reply." "Sing Praise to Him" (#70) wishes "that men may hear the grateful song." "Praise the Lord with Heart and Voice" (#73) calls upon "all men on earth [to] rejoice" and speaks of "wondrous love to all men shown." "Praise Ye the Lord" (#74) asks a question about which I am tempted to be flippant—"Why should I make a man my trust?" More to the point, it remarks on the happiness of "the man whose hopes rely / On Israel's God." It credits the Lord with helping "the widow and the fatherless." Three hymns are addressed to "God of Our Fathers": "God of Our Fathers, We Come unto Thee" (#76); "God of Our Fathers, Whose Almighty Hand" (#78); and "God of Our Fathers, Known of Old" (#80). "Press Forward, Saints" (#81) urges us to advance with "Love of all mankind." "For All the Saints" (#82) refers to Christ's "soldiers." "Faith of our Fathers"<sup>10</sup> (#84) praises male forebears and predicts that mankind will be "truly free" through God's truth. "Great God, Attend While Zion Sings" (#88) states, "Blest is the man that trusts in thee!"

"Prayer and Supplication" contains seventy-two hymns, nine of which contain exclusionary language. Men wrote seven of these nine texts; five of the authors are LDS.

"Ye Simple Souls Who Stray" (#118) asks why sinners "mock the sons of God." "I Believe in Christ" (#134) refers to Christ's "reign / 'Mid mortal men" and to his "rule among the sons of men." The hymn quotes the Savior as saying to men, "Come, follow me, / That ye, my friends, with God may be." "My Redeemer Lives" (#135) calls the Son of God "the one bright hope of men on earth." "Did You Think To Pray?" (#140) asks a question of "my brother." "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee" (#141) speaks of the "Savior of mankind." In "Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire" (#145) the Christian is referred to with *he* and *his*. "Gently Raise the Sacred Strain" (#146) assigns the benefits of the Sabbath to man—"That man may rest, / And return his thanks to God." "We Have Partaken of Thy Love" (#155) mentions a resolve "to serve our fellowmen," and the persona in "Before Thee, Lord, I Bow My Head" (#158) leaves a church service "to mingle with my fellowmen."

The hymnal contains twenty-eight sacrament songs, with twenty-six texts: "While of These Emblems We Partake" has two musical settings (#173 and #174), as does "Tis Sweet to Sing the Matchless Love" (#176 and #177). Twelve of the twenty-six hymns contain exclusionary language, and one contains a pejorative reference. Twelve of the texts have LDS authors; ten were written by men.

"While of These Emblems We Partake" (#173 and #174) speaks of Christ's sacrifice as a release for man from the slavery "of death, of hell, [and] of the grave." "O God, the Eternal Father" (#175) says that Christ's death is an "offring / By man least understood" and that Christ had "no apparent beauty, / That man should him desire." "Tis Sweet to Sing the Matchless Love" (#176 and #177) praises Christ, who came to earth "to suffer, bleed, and die for man!" "O Lord of Hosts" (#178) calls upon us "as brethren" to live "in fellowship and peace!" In "We'll Sing All Hail to Jesus' Name" (#182), Christ demands that "the grave yield up

her dead." In "Upon the Cross of Calvary" (#184), Christ died "for all mankind to see" and in his dying "brought new birth / Through resurrection's miracle / To all the sons of earth." "Reverently and Meekly Now" (#185), in the voice of Christ, asks us to "with thy brethren be at peace." "Again We Meet Around the Board" (#186) tells of Christ's leaving "his Father's courts on high, / With man to live, for man to die." The persona in "God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son" (#187) uses the comparison "like son to sire" and also speaks "as son." "O Thou, Before the World Began" (#189) identifies Christ's sacrifice as "ordained . . . for man." "In Memory of the Crucified" (#190), the person who receives the sacrament "with pure intent" is promised "that in our Savior he'll abide." "Behold the Great Redeemer Die" (#191) says that Christ died "that man may live." Although "He Died! The Great Redeemer Died" (#192) refers to the weeping of "Israel's daughters," it also states that "the Lord of glory died for men."

Only four Easter songs are included in the hymnal, and three of them contain exclusionary language. Two of those three hymns were written by men; one of the authors is LDS. "That Easter Morn" (#198) declares that the empty tomb "proclaimed to man." "He is Risen" (#199) says that "man is free" because of Christ's resurrection. In "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" (#200), "Sons of men and angels" sing "Alleluia!"

Eighty-four hymns appear under "Special Topics"; twenty-seven of them contain exclusionary language. Fourteen of the twenty-seven texts were written by LDS authors; thirteen were written by men.

"Ring Out, Wild Bells" (#215) speaks of "valiant men and free." "We Give Thee But Thine Own" (#218) wants "the lone and fatherless" tended. "Because I Have Been Given Much" (#219) promises to "divide my gifts from thee / With ev'ry brother that I see." The persona also vows to share food and shelter so "that he too [the needy brother] may be comforted." "Lord, I Would Follow Thee" (#220) twice expresses the desire to be "my brother's keeper" and speaks of loving "my brother." "Have I Done Any Good?" (#223) says that "'tis noble of

man to work and to give" and that "only he who does something helps others to live." "You Can Make the Pathway Bright" (#228) suggests doing "a kindly deed / To your neighbor in his need" and sharing "his burden . . . As you lift his load of care." "Nay, Speak No Ill" (#233) calls for "a nobler estimate of man." "Should You Feel Inclined to Censure" (#235) advises, "Do not. . . / Trifle with a brother's fame." "Lord, Accept into Thy Kingdom" (#236) declares that Christ "witnessed unto men."

"Know This, That Every Soul Is Free" (#240) speaks of the soul as choosing "his life and what he'll be"; it also states "that God will force no man to heav'n" and that "freedom and reason make us men." "Come Along, Come Along" (#244) declares that "most men can be led" and predicts that "brotherhood [will] flourish the wide world around." "Onward, Christian Soldiers" (#246) has, of course, a martial air associated normally with men, but it also announces, "Brothers, we are treading / Where the Saints have trod," commands, "Brothers, lift your voices," and declares that "men and angels" have sung "through countless ages." "Up, Awake, Ye Defenders of Zion" (#248) refers to soldiers and warriors. "We Are All Enlisted" (#250) and "Behold! A Royal Army" (#251) also employ the metaphor of the soldier.

"Like Ten Thousand Legions Marching" (#253) admires "Sons of Joseph" in the mission field. "Carry On" (#255) gives credit to "our fathers" for planting a rock "for us in this goodly land." "Rejoice! A Glorious Sound Is Heard" (#257) calls on "sons of men" to "Arise and sing." "Come, All Whose Souls Are Lighted" (#268) wants the missionary message extended "to men benighted." "Jehovah, Lord of Heaven and Earth" (#269) envisions "one general chorus . . . / From men of ev'ry tongue." "Truth Reflects upon Our Senses" (#273) three times speaks of a brother. "Men Are That They Might Have Joy" (#275) is based on 2 Nephi 2:25, a beloved passage. Nevertheless, the language is exclusionary. "Come Away to the Sunday School" (#276) urges that churchgoers "prove ourselves as soldiers true." "As I Search the Holy Scriptures" (#277) speaks to the "Loving Father of mankind."

"Help Me Teach With Inspiration" (#281) prays to "reach a friend in darkness" and to "guide him thru the night." "If You Could Hie to Kolob" (#284) reports the whisper of the Spirit: "No man has found pure space." "How Beautiful Thy Temples, Lord" (#288) states that the restored gospel is "taught to men anew" and that "all mankind it would save."

Of the ten songs for children, fortunately only one contains exclusionary language. It was written by an LDS woman. "Love One Another" (#308) states that through love "shall men know / Ye are my disciples."

One hymn in the section "For Women" calls for comment because it was written by a man—"We Meet Again as Sisters" (#311) by Paul L. Anderson. Probably to forestall critical observation, Davidson reports:

*To the obvious question of whether (or why) a man should write a Relief Society hymn, Paul Anderson's answer was: "I wrote it out of a sincere belief. As women respect and honor the priesthood, so men can appreciate and honor the dignity of women."*

Davidson continues, somewhat condescendingly:

*Thus he wrote a hymn to emphasize that what women do is important and noble, a hymn that includes a reference to our "heavenly parents" and a statement that women are heirs "to every gospel blessing"—to serve as a companion hymn to those that honor the calling of the priesthood.<sup>11</sup>*

I do not doubt Anderson's sincerity; but even if Davidson's explanation is acceptable, we should note that in the section "For Men," none of the four texts written by women attempt to speak in a masculine voice. The authors of the two hymns that employ the word *priesthood*—"Ye Who Are Called to Labor" (#321) and "See the Mighty Priesthood Gathered" (#325)—do not try to write as priesthood holders, but Anderson does speak with the voice of a sister.<sup>12</sup>

The patriotic section, four songs in all, contains an astonishing example of sexism in "God Save the King." Despite the fact that Elizabeth II as-

cended the British throne in 1952 and Britons have been singing "God Save the Queen" for four decades, the hymnal committee chose the masculine. Davidson does not consider this problem in her book, but I asked her in a telephone conversation for an explanation. Her reply was that she supposed the committee had decided to use "the generic form" of the hymn.<sup>13</sup>

Not all the examples of sexist language I have cited are of equal consequence or are equally objectionable. Furthermore, I must acknowledge that some hymns mentioned cannot be altered without damage to their basic character, and some are so familiar and so entrenched that a change might be met with hostility.<sup>14</sup> In some hymns, the rhyme scheme or meter might preclude their revision. I wish to reemphasize the fact that the 1985 hymnal is a vast improvement over its 1948 antecedent. It is disappointing, however, that those responsible for the new hymnal did so little to replace sexist language in a work designed to serve the Church well into the twenty-first century.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>*Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985). Quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by hymn number. The title of this paper was irresistibly suggested by Hymn 75, "In Hymns of Praise."

<sup>3</sup>For a complete listing, see Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and Messages* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1988), 18-20.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 21-23.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>6</sup>The current RLDS hymnal *Hymns of the Saints* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1981), #136, uses this phrasing.

<sup>7</sup>*Our Latter-day Hymns*, 239.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>10</sup>A Protestant hymnal of 1976, *The New Church Hymnal* (N.p.: Lexicon Music, Inc., 1976), contains "Faith of Our Mothers" (#190) sung to the same hymn tune. The maternal influence portrayed is traditional, as the first of four stanzas illustrates:

Faith of our mothers, living still  
In cradle song and bedtime prayer;  
In nursery lore and fireside love,  
Thy presence still pervades the air;  
Faith of our mothers, living faith!  
We will be true to thee till death.

<sup>11</sup>Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns*, 312-13.

<sup>12</sup>It should also be noted that of the ten selections in the women's section of the hymnal, eight were written by men. The men's section has nineteen selections, with eighteen texts, "Rise Up, O Men of God" having two musical settings (#323 and #324). Fourteen texts were written by men. The 1950 hymnal contained forty-seven selections labeled "Male Chorus" or "Men's Voices" and forty-one designated for "Women's Chorus" or "Women's Voices."

<sup>13</sup>Davidson refers to "God Save the Queen" in her discussion of "Advance Australia Fair" and "God Defend New Zealand," *ibid.*, 330, 332.

<sup>14</sup>For an interesting account of hymnal revision in a Protestant denomination, see Jack Boyd, "An Angry Noise Unto the Lord," *Newsweek*, 29 December 1986, 7.

# "And There Was . . . a New Writing": The Book of Mormon as a Never-Ending Text

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THE LAST PART OF THIS TITLE is not meant to suggest anything about the length of the Book of Mormon. Rather, what I hope to consider is the relationship between the reader and the text that the Book of Mormon itself suggests. For it seems to me that the book is remarkably clear in the instruction and examples that it gives within its own pages in both calling for and exemplifying particular protocols of reading.

Reading, especially of sacred texts, is a complex act. Robert Scholes summarizes much of current theory for us:

*[Reading, he says] looks in two directions. One direction is back, toward the source and original context of the signs we are deciphering. The other direction is forward, based on the textual situation of the person doing the reading. It is because reading is almost always an affair of at least two times, two places, and two consciousnesses that interpretation is the endlessly fascinating, difficult, and important matter that [it] is. We see this most acutely in religious, legal, and literary reading, of course, but it is part of the fabric, of the structure, of reading as a human act, whatever is being read. Most theories of reading emphasize or privilege one face or the other of this two faced activity. Reactionary theories emphasize the face that looks back. They tend to seek original truth or original intent as the master protocol of readings that will be as positive and unchanging as they can be. Radical theories emphasize the face that looks forward, insisting on the freedom and creativity of the reader along with the mutability of meanings in general.<sup>2</sup>*

Scholes goes on to put the matter in a somewhat clearer model:

*We will probably do better to think of reading in terms of centripetal and centrifugal postures. Centripetal reading conceives of a text in terms of an original intention located at the center of that text. Reading done under this rubric will try to reduce the text to this pure core of unmixed intentionality. Centrifugal reading, on the other hand, sees the life of a text as occurring along its circumference, which is constantly expanding, encompassing new possibilities of meaning. (8)*

It is, for some theorists perhaps, in this centrifugal mode of expanding, reader-centered meanings, that the idea of "never-ending" is located. What Wilhelm Dilthey says regarding poetry illustrates this matter as well:

*What the reader abstracts from the interweaving of characters and destinies is his own, subjectively formulated, idea which he derived from the enjoyment of the poetry, though it is not inherent in the poem itself. This explains the infinite variety of a poetic work which allows its content to be expressed in quite different conceptual interpretations but exhausted by none.<sup>3</sup>*

Such a position represents one extreme of our reading model. While it is instructive and in many ways helpful in recognizing subjective aspects of the reading experience, it nevertheless leaves us in an unconstrained interpretive relationship between reader and text which, particularly in a religious context, is finally so close to solipsism as to make one psychically very uncomfortable. It may help us understand sectarian fragmentation, but it is not at all what the Book of Mormon outlines for itself.

At the other extreme of this model, in the so-called intentionalist direction, the idea of "never-ending" may simply refer to statements of eternal



truths that are beyond interpretation. Such a foundationalist or fundamentalist theory claims that such truths are easily accessible because “texts always say just what they mean, so that any honest or decent person ought to be able to understand this perfectly clear meaning without making any fuss about it,” as Scholes captures the position. However, “the problem with this position is that it requires an infallible author, a perfect language, and a timeless context in order to work.” (52) And while the Book of Mormon speaks over and over again about concerns for clarity and plainness of text, it also speaks much of the need for interpretation; and in fact, it is in this area of textual interpretation that the book sets forth the important protocols that I wish to examine.

Here I should pause to note what has been pointed out so many times before: the Book of Mormon is not only an interestingly self-conscious text, but it is also a notably reader-conscious text, continually discussing and exemplifying the act of reading. It both teaches and demonstrates the protocols—the codes and customs—by which we negotiate our differences from and with the text so that we can establish the appropriate relationships with it.

What the book itself proposes is a method of reading that at once includes and goes beyond the two-dimensional model we have been looking at. What it proposes is an additional dimension to this two dimensional model—a third transcendent element that is at once separate and apart from, and yet still conditionally part of, both the reader and the text. This different protocol does not exclude, necessarily, that which we associate with the two dimensional model of reading we have outlined; but by introducing this third, transcendental element, it opens up matters of meanings, understandings, and values, creating a kind of textuality that may not be accessible by other protocols.

This way of reading is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in one of the significant typological figures in the Book of Mormon, the Liahona, a ball or compass given miraculously to Lehi and his family as they begin the nearly eight years of their wilderness journey. It was, as Nephi recalls for us, “a round

ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness” (1 Ne 16:10).

But it was not the received geographical directions alone that made the Liahona significant. In a time of particular stress and difficulty, Lehi was told by the Lord to

*look upon the ball and behold the things which are written.*

*And it came to pass that when my father beheld the things which were written upon the ball, he did fear and tremble exceedingly, and also my brethren and the sons of Ishmael and our wives.*

*And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.*

*And there was also written upon them a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it. (1 Nephi 16:26-29)*

The particular figural significance of the “ball or compass” is made explicit later in the Book of Mormon, as this sacred object is passed from father to son along with the scriptural records. After reiterating that the Liahona “did work for [their fathers] according to their faith in God” (Alma 37:40), Alma explains to his son Helaman that the Liahona has a typological function, a function which co-mingles ideas of compass, scriptures, and the word of God:

*And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass . . . and did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual.*

*For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land.*

*And now I say, is there not a type in this thing? for just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise.*

*O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live. (Alma 37:43-46)*

What is of particular interest for us in these instructions is, first of all, the clear association in Alma's mind of the Liahona with scriptures, particularly with the brass plates. Indeed the Liahona and the brass plates were kept together as one, passed down together through the history of the Lehite people, and preserved together.<sup>4</sup>

And lest there be any confusion, Nephi makes clear that the expression, "the words of Christ," in this instance refer specifically to the Book of Mormon text: "Hearken unto these words and believe in Christ," he says, referring to the plates he has prepared, "And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me" (2 Ne. 33:10-11).

But of even more significance for our concern today is the continuing instruction in this and other passages regarding the reader and the text: reading the Liahona required a certain attitude toward the ball itself. To use Nephi's language again, it worked<sup>5</sup> "according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto it" (2 Ne. 16:28), thus outlining necessary elements of the extraordinary protocol demanded not only by the Liahona, but the texts for which it is the figure.

How significant this model is to the interpretation of the Book of Mormon is emphasized and reemphasized in the examples and instructions which the book itself gives about reading sacred texts. Consider, for instance, the occasion on which the priests of King Noah question Abinadi about the meaning of Isaiah 52:7-10. Whatever reading the priests of Noah have given to these verses, it is clear that a different reading is accessible to Abinadi: "Are you priests," he asks,

*and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean? . . . Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people? (Mosiah 12:25, 27)*

Earlier in the book, after Nephi had read from the plates of brass to Laman and Lemuel, he records, "My brethren came unto me and said unto me: What meaneth these things which ye have read?" Again, the protocol for understanding assumes a certain transcendent dimension:

*And I, Nephi, said unto them: Behold they were manifest unto the prophet by the voice of the Spirit; for by the Spirit are all things made known unto the prophets, . . . Wherefore, the things of which I have read are things pertaining to things both temporal and spiritual. (1 Nephi 22:1-3)*

Again the inference that the elements of that protocol are those which God would establish including desire, humility, and faith.

As the Book of Mormon infers for itself, any interpretation based entirely on a reader/text, two-dimensional model will not be entirely satisfactory, for the text itself is imperfect. There is as the book declares, "weakness in [the] writing" (Ether 12:23). Many of the book's major authors bemoan the difficulties of writing and the inadequacies of the written page. Indeed, one of the central issues that Moroni saw for himself as an author was his dissatisfaction with his own texts. To the Lord he said,

*The Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; . . .*

*And thou hast made us that we could write but little, because of the awkwardness of our hands. Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing. . . . Wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words. (Ether 12:23-25)*

In his response to Moroni's concern, the Lord makes clear that textual deficiencies are not the real issue here, that there will be an added, transcendent dimension given to the engagement with the text if certain protocols are followed:

*My grace [the Lord says to Moroni] is sufficient for the meek, that they [that is, the meek] shall take no advantage of your weakness; And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness.*

*I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:26-27)*

The context here makes clear that "weak things" includes not only *things* in general, but also the particular text of the Book of Mormon that is Moroni's concern. In other words if one "reads" the text on the Lord's terms, meekly, humbly, and with faith, God himself will perform a work for both text and reader.

Those elements are reiterated in the final verses of the book, when Moroni explicitly instructs the reader in the protocols for a particular reading of the text which he himself recommends:

*Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.*

*And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.*

*And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moro. 10:3-5)*

With these words, Moroni invites the reader to prepare for and thus to expect an experience that involves not only the reader and the text but also a transcendent experience that is both identified with and yet outside both the text and the reader.

This may help us to understand more fully also the implied application of Moroni's preface to the Book of Mormon in which he writes, it seems to me, both of the book's translation (a task assigned to Joseph Smith) and the book's interpretation (a task given to every reader). Writing of the final abridgment received by Joseph Smith, he says that the plates were

*written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God. (Preface to the Book of Mormon; italics mine)*

Whether seen as extraordinary restrictions to the act of reading or as unusual opportunities, these protocols suggest an attitude and approach to the text that help us negotiate the dilemmas of the two-dimensional model and yet provide a textual experience that is at once stable and, at least in the Liahona sense, never-ending.

Many of those who observe these protocols enter a culture that is shot through with elements of the sacred. Those who have done so talk freely of transcendent intervention as part of the process of reading. For these, the experience of Lehi and Nephi with the Liahona is not alien but entirely familiar. It is a type for which their own textual experience is the antitype. Such modern readers confess that there is continuously written in their texts "a new writing, which [is] plain to be read, which give[s] them understanding . . . and it [is] written and changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which [they give] unto it." In this sense of newness, the Book of Mormon is indeed a never-ending text.

But the personal and private nature of religious experience may carry with it the very seeds that subvert or destroy the community in which it occurs. It has its own centrifugal force as the course of sectarian history suggests. However, in the case of certain readers of the Book of Mormon, just the opposite seems to be the true. At least there seems little sense of forces of dissociation or separation at work. Rather there seems to be a stronger sense of

community. For while these individuals engage the text separately in the privacy of their own mind and heart, there is, as the protocols are observed, also an apparent consistency in the nature of their individual experiences, giving a sense not only of community, but of stability to the textual experience itself, as though these protocols define a means of communal definition.

It is perhaps more than an interesting aside to note that none of the denominations that have separated from the original Church organized by Joseph Smith privilege the Book of Mormon to the extent of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. None, to my knowledge, hold it up or point to it as anything like a keystone, regardless of their profession of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling. To take the book on its own terms, to observe the protocols for reading that the book sets forth, implies a textual experience that is in some respects radically different from the mainstream.

This is not to say that such a protocol is the only way in which the book should be approached. I would not be misunderstood on this point. I am not arguing that only the faithful can successfully deal with the text of the Book of Mormon. The book is a significant and challenging text, regardless of orientation, and it invites from every reader the best tools of literary theory and criticism available. Cultural, historical, exegetical, and textual theories of all kinds yield impressive insights and understandings. My argument here is that there is a particular protocol of reading which the book itself asks for which cannot be entirely disregarded.

I relied heavily on Robert Scholes to begin with. Perhaps I could end with him as well. Reading, he says,

*is dialectical. What I first called backward and forward movements and then centripetal and centrifugal impulses are the differential forces that drive the reading process. Without both of them, the process stops, becomes dead, ceases to be. And both of these forces or impulses, it must be emphasized, require creative and critical textual skills. (8-9)*

To this I would add, finally, that in the case of the Book of Mormon there can be more than a duality of forces at work, that there is, according to the book's

own protocols for reading, a third and transcendental force which can give new form to the reader's experience and to the text itself. If this is so, then the vision with which the Book of Mormon opens sets forth an important pattern: As Nephi reports,

*And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he . . . came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read. And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord. . . .*

*And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; . . .*

*for his soul did rejoice and his whole heart was filled because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto him. (1 Nephi 1:9-15)*

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Scholes, *Protocols of Reading* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 7. Further citations from this work appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup>As quoted in Scholes, *Protocols of Reading*, 55.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, 2 Nephi 5:12 ("I, Nephi, had also brought the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass; and also the ball, or compass, which was prepared for my father"); Mosiah 1:16 ("he also gave [Mosiah] charge concerning the records . . . upon the plates of brass; and also the plates of Nephi; and also, the sword of Laban, and the ball or director"); and D&C 17:1 ("you shall have a view of the plates, and also of the breastplate, the sword of Laban, the Urin and Thummim, . . . and the miraculous directors which were given to Lehi while in the wilderness"). The context of Alma 37 also suggests that Alma was transmitting the Liahona along with the brass plates to his son Helaman.

<sup>5</sup>This is an especially effective verb in light of Jane Tompkins's concept of "literary texts as doing work, expressing and shaping the social context that produced them." *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 200.

# "After Ye Have Received So Many Witnesses": Symbolic Action in Alma 32-34

Keith H. Lane<sup>1</sup>

I START THIS PAPER with at least these assumptions: (1) that the Book of Mormon might best be read as a work of rhetoric, a work designed to persuade, rather than a philosophical or doctrinal treatise, or a book of spiritual rules and procedures; (2) that we should, as many have already suggested, hear what the scriptures have to say to us, rather than impose a preconceived system on them. One helpful way to do this is to see the scriptures (in this case the Book of Mormon) as works of persuasion through testimony.

For us to read or hear the scriptures as testimony, we must not come searching for concepts or rules, but rather remain open to the words of the testimony. An argument or proof invites analysis in terms of knowledge (a doctrinal analysis), or in terms of comparisons to a predetermined system of concepts or procedures. But if we read scriptures as such, we miss the effect that their testimonies should have on us. Testimony requires a different approach than proofs or arguments. We must grant testimony a receptive hearing.

Only by letting the text speak to us as testimony can we experience the Book of Mormon as the testimony of prophets, as another testament of Jesus Christ—and only then is the work genuinely (and appropriately) persuasive.

It is for this reason that I find the work of Kenneth Burke useful in helping us read more openly, with an ear for the action of the text and what it has to say to us. Burke sees language as symbolic action. A text is a response (or action) to a given situation and asserts attitudes and actions one should take.

Burke's pentad (scene, act, agent, agency, purpose) which he discusses primarily in *Grammar of Motives*, is "concerned with the basic forms of

thought which, in accordance with the nature of the world as all men necessarily experience it, are exemplified in the attributing of motives."<sup>2</sup> And the pentad (to which Burke occasionally adds the category of "attitude" and calls the hexad) contains the elements we inevitably bring up in asking "what people are doing and why they are doing it" (xv). In seeing our use of language as symbolic action, Burke says that certain factors will necessarily be involved as we talk about a particular act and the possible motives for taking that action:

*In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency), and the purpose. Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: What was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose). (xv)*

Burke's pentad "affords a serviceably over-all structure for the analysis of both literary texts in particular and human relations in general."<sup>3</sup> Burke's pentad "used as a generating principle . . . should provide us with a kind of simplicity that can be developed into considerable complexity, and yet can be discovered beneath its elaborations" (xvi). It offers a way to talk about things, people, actions,

and motives, but not a way to nail them down—they can't be, at least without pain or peril. The pentad does not set forth "terms that avoid ambiguity, but terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise" (xviii).

With the pentad fully in mind, then, let us turn to an analysis of Alma 32-34. I will first fill in the blanks, as it were, of the pentad, and comment briefly on what the text might mean for us.

## Scene

Alma and Amulek are heading up a mission to preach to the Zoramites, a proud, self-righteous group who "did pervert many of the ways of the Lord" (Alma 31:10). In the missionaries' efforts to preach to these people on every appropriate occasion, "they began to have success among the poor class of people" who "were cast out of the synagogues" and generally "esteemed as filthiness" and "dross" (31:1-3).

Alma, while preaching to people on the "hill Onidah," is approached by the "one who was foremost" among the poor, who says,

*Behold, what shall these my brethren do, for they are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, and more especially by our priests; for they have cast us out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty; and we have no place to worship our God; and behold, what shall we do? (Alma 32:5; italics mine)*

The question "What shall we do?" is the question Alma responds to and is the springboard for the rest of this chapter and, along with some clarifying questions asked later, chapters 33 and 34 as well.

This is the basic situation Alma responds to: A poor class is used, despised, and excluded from formal worship by a richer class. The poor class ask Alma what they should do, and especially how they ought to worship under such circumstances.

## Act:

Alma's and Amulek's "act" might be stated briefly as two sermons in which the people are exhorted to have faith in Christ, repent, and worship

God in all circumstances, have patience, and be charitable. But a complete discussion of the action must essentially cover all that goes on in the sermons Alma and Amulek give. But rather than go into intricate detail I will touch only upon what I consider to be the main action.

Alma's act in response to this inquiry of what the poor people should do is not first to speak, but to turn himself about, "his face immediately towards" the one who asked the question. He sees with "great joy" that the poor people's afflictions have put them "in a preparation to hear the word" (32:6). Alma's act is not to initially concern himself or the people over their condition of poverty but to deal directly with the question of what these people should do since they are cast out of the synagogue (32:9-13). His response is to teach them they can worship in places other than the synagogue, that they ought to worship more than once a week, and that it is probably even good that they have been cast out so they might learn humility, repentance, and wisdom. Alma's primary concern is not that the people be relieved of their poverty, nor that they get their rightful place in society, but rather that they repent. The other matters are important (and Alma and Amulek will address them), but first things must come first, and the first thing is to repent.

It is to this end, then, that Alma commends humility and exhorts the people to faith. We most often hear chapter 32 explained as a discourse on faith, and discussions about it usually wander off into arguments about what knowledge and faith are, and which is superior. While Alma does talk about faith and knowledge here, in terms of action his talk is one of exhortation (trying to get the people to repent), not theology. Consequently, the explanation that "faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true" (32:21) need not be seen as a theological and complete definition of faith, but rather as an explanation given to help a particular people understand what they should do in their particular circumstances.

From here, Alma encourages the people to "awake and arouse [their] faculties, even to an ex-

periment upon my words" (32:27); and he explains the things involved and the possible results of their giving place to the word and trying it in their hearts (32:28-43).

Up to this point, however, Alma's act has primarily been to prepare the people for his word—to create a desire, humility, and faith that will lead to its reception. He hasn't really given them *the* word. And so the people send to "know whether they should believe in one God, that they might obtain" the fruit Alma promised as they tried the word, "or how they should plant the seed, or the word," and "in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith" (33:1).

Alma responds to these questions by returning to his earlier concern that the people understand that they can worship God even though they are cast out of the synagogue, and he quotes several scriptures to them to support this idea (33:2-12). Initially it seems as if he avoids the questions he has been asked, until we see that he says that they can call on God in any circumstance, and that God hears them, has mercy, and turns away his judgments "because of [his] Son" (33:11-13). And Alma then asks, in light of what the scriptures say, "How can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?" (33:14). The Son of God (and if the Son, then implicitly the Father) is the God he tells them they should believe in.

Alma next answers the questions of how to plant the seed and in what way to begin exercising faith, by recalling the "type . . . raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live" (32:19) and exhorting the people to,

*cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works. (33:22)*

Alma's brief explanation of the Savior and his gospel is *the* word he wants the people to believe in, and he tells them so: "I desire that ye shall plant *this* word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell

even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life" (33:23; italics mine). Having urged the people to act on the word given them, Alma sits down. His act in response to the whole situation is remarkably simple and straightforward: a recommendation of humility, repentance, and faith to try the word of the Son of God.

At this point Amulek takes up the discussion about the Son of God and reviews briefly the action taken by Alma in response to their question of what they should do. Amulek states that Alma spoke "somewhat unto you to prepare your minds; yea and he hath exhorted you unto faith and to patience . . . even to plant the word in your hearts" (34:3-4). Amulek will give them more of what they have been properly prepared for.

Continuing, Amulek notes to the people that "the great question which is in your minds is whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ" (34:5). He reminds his audience that Alma has called on many of the prophets to prove that the word is in Christ and says that he himself "will testify" to them "that these things are true." Amulek explains the need for a redeemer and an "infinite and eternal sacrifice" and that "this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal" (34:6-14). Amulek then explains the need for salvation and the satisfying of justice by mercy, through the atonement and a person's faith and repentance (34:15-16).

At this point, after the people have been prepared by Alma and had the doctrine of Christ preached to them, Amulek implores that God may grant that "ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; Yea cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save" (34:17-18). All the faith, all the desire, all the belief in Christ, are designed to bring them to this action: the cry for mercy. The prophet's desire is that people come unto Christ, and the genuine cry for mercy is the act that most turns them to him. Amulek ad-

monishes his listeners to "continue in prayer" and to "cry unto him" in all places, and "when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you" (34:19-27). So Amulek's answer to the initial inquiry of what this people should do, seeing that they are cast out of the synagogue is, like Alma's, to believe in the word of Christ, and repent—to cry unto him for mercy.

Amulek is quick to point out, however, that this is not all. The people must also care for those in need and remember to be charitable; otherwise "your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith" (34:28-29).

Next Amulek exhorts the people that after hearing so many witnesses they,

*come forth and bring fruit unto repentance. Yea I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your heart, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you. (34:30-31)*

Amulek stresses the urgency of repenting (34:31-34) and urges his audience to "work out their salvation with fear before God" and "no more deny the coming of Christ," that they "contend no more against the Holy Ghost" but receive it and take on them Christ's name:

*Humble yourselves even to the dust, and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth; and . . . live in thanksgiving daily, for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you. (34:37-38)*

Amulek recommends immediate repentance, humility, a constant worship of God, and living in thanksgiving, to a group who thought they were in terrible circumstances. He also cautions them to pray constantly that they not be overrun by temptation (39) and then adds this:

*I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions; that ye do not revile against those who do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty, lest ye become sinners like unto them; But that ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions. (34:40-41)*

Alma and Amulek's action towards the down-trodden poor who look to them for answers is to urge them to faith and repentance. Very little is said about political solutions or practical helps in getting along in these hard circumstances. Instead, Alma and Amulek work to get the people to turn to the Lord, knowing that that action should be their fundamental concern. Until their relationship with the Lord is heading in the right direction, none of the other problems will find a proper resolution.

## Agent:

In these chapters we have two "major" agents—Alma and Amulek. Not much is said in the chapters about them, but in both cases, their characters are revealed as concerned, compassionately honest, and certain of their purpose. In previous chapters of the Book of Mormon we read more of these two people, and many of these earlier passages bear on our understanding of the kind of agents acting in these particular chapters.

Alma at one time caused much trouble, associating with a group whom the record calls the "very vilest of sinners" (Mosiah 28:4). With the visit of an angel, Alma reverses his direction and becomes a most untiring laborer for the Lord, serving the people as chief judge, and as the high priest over the church.

We are first introduced to Amulek at a time when Alma is preaching to an absolutely unreceptive group of people. Alma leaves the people, but is instructed to return, and upon returning is met, taken in, sheltered, and fed by Amulek who was told by an angel that a prophet would come and he should receive him (Alma 8). Amulek serves with Alma from then on. We are even told that Amulek forsook "all his gold, and silver, and his precious things" and was "rejected by those who were once



his friends and also by his father and his kindred" (Alma 15:16). So his is an experienced voice when he speaks to the group who are facing similar troubles.

Alma and Amulek go through much together. After preaching together for the first time, they are imprisoned, and taken bound to watch the burning of those they have preached to and converted. When Amulek urges that they use the power of God to save the people, Alma responds that the Spirit constrains him not to do so, "for the Lord receiveth them up unto himself" (Alma 14:11). This proves instructive in our discussion of Alma 32-34 as we see that Alma puts submission to the Lord's will and his fundamental concern for a people's relation to the Lord, above all other considerations.

Alma and Amulek organize many efforts to preach the word. It is also interesting to note that they often speak together, Amulek taking up where Alma finishes. Alma and Amulek seem to work well together, building on each other's words and offering joint testimony, as they do on this occasion.

## Agency

In reasoning out *how*, or by what means, Alma and Amulek act, I will skip all the literary devices and rhetorical appeals they use and focus on their use of testimony.

Both speakers quote scriptures and make references to the law of Moses to "prove," as Amulek puts it, "that the word is in Christ unto salvation" (34:6-7). This "proving," of course, seems to be quite different from compelling philosophical arguments, but rather seems to be the compiling of testimonies. And indeed that is what Amulek says next: "I will testify unto you myself that these things are true" (34:8). After he has borne his witness, Amulek then hopes that "after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, ye come forth and bring fruit unto repentance" (34:30).

For all their use of poetry, scriptures, analogies, parables, reasoned arguments, or appeals to the law, all is accompanied by and stated fundamentally as testimony.

## Purpose

Alma and Amulek's purpose, as seems evident from the action taken, is to exhort the people to a belief on Christ and to repentance. Their motive is not to school the people in a way of thinking that they must accept because of their arguments, but to simply get them to try the word for themselves. Their purpose is to urge the people to make that effort—to come unto Christ.

If I am correct in my belief that all the prophets' purposes and messages have been more or less the same (come unto Christ), then it ought not to surprise us that Alma and Amulek have the same purpose and message. Nor should it surprise us that that purpose is so evident in how they deliver their message: by testimony.

Of all the means the prophets use to persuade people to repent, we might ask why they choose testimony as their preferred way of speaking. In part it seems that testimony is used because the prophets do not wish to persuade merely by logically compelling arguments or proofs. Such arguments or proofs are something that any person trained well enough could do, and any persuasion resulting from these arguments does not need the Lord to be effective (something unacceptable to the prophets). In some ways, such arguments rely on compulsion—intellectual compulsion, but compulsion nonetheless—rather than persuasion resulting from the influence of the Lord's presence.

Testimony, on the other hand, seems to acknowledge the agency of both speaker and audience. Testimony also requires an openness on behalf of the listeners. Similarly, when the prophets bear testimony, their hope is that we give them a hearing, that we hearken to their testimony.

For the prophets, testimony is effective because the being of whom they testify is real and powerful and because he involves himself in the process of persuasion. If we hear the word of the Lord spoken through the prophets, then the prophets' part in the process of persuasion is completed. It is left to us to respond to the Lord's call.

We are given this account in its particular form as one more testimony, among all the testimonies in the Book of Mormon, that seeks to persuade us that Jesus is the Christ and that urges us to come to him. In other words, the solution Alma and Amulek give to their audience in response to their particular problem is the same general exhortation of the Book of Mormon—to come unto Christ. Alma and Amulek's call to faith, repentance, prayer, patience, and charity joins in the chorus of voices raised in harmony throughout the Book of Mormon, singing the song of redeeming love—a song meant for us. And if we identify with those called to have faith, then Amulek's words speak clearly to us: "I would that after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, ye come forth and bring fruit unto repentance."

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Burke, *Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), xv. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>3</sup>Burke, "Questions and Answers about the Pentad," *College Composition and Communication* 29 (1978): 336-40.

# Liminality in the Book of Mormon

Richard Dilworth Rust<sup>1</sup>

**A**N OVERARCHING WAY to see the Book of Mormon is in terms of its liminal persons, places, and actions. Derived from *limen*, Latin for "threshold," "liminality" means being on the edge or threshold between two different places or conditions; it involves crossing boundaries or being in between worlds.

A perfect artistic rendition of liminality is Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel painting of the creation of Adam. The recumbent Adam is on earth and on a slightly lower level than God who is in a cloud of heaven. The Father is reaching out toward Adam, with his forefinger almost touching Adam's. While this creation or birth of man and also mankind is liminal in itself, the slight space between the finger of God and the finger of Adam is electrically charged as a threshold between the powers of heaven and the potentials of earth.

In a similar way, the Book of Mormon portrays the connections between heaven and earth. The book begins with Nephi, on earth, recounting his father's being carried away in a vision in which he sees Christ descend "out of the midst of heaven" and with twelve others going "forth upon the face of the earth" (1 Ne. 1:8-11). At the end, Moroni on earth is soon to go to rest in paradise "until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air" (Moro. 10:34). The Book of Mormon's story of the fall and return of humankind portrays the limitations, such as materialism and pride, of earth-bound people and, on the other hand, aspirations toward heaven. Awe-inspiring experiences show heaven coming down to earth in the form of angels, such as those ministering to the repentant Lamanites who had impris-

oned the brothers Nephi and Lehi (Hel. 5), or in the descent of the resurrected Jesus Christ himself (3 Ne. 11).

In the Book of Mormon, liminal persons are those without class or status, or those who minimize their status. They are, as anthropologist Victor Turner puts it, "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."<sup>2</sup> They undergo what Arnold van Gennep defines as a "rite of transition," literal or figurative movement through "neutral zones" such as deserts or forests.<sup>3</sup>

A classic definition of liminal persons is given by Nephi's brother Jacob. He laments that "our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren" (Jacob 7:27). Those who desire freedom and equality and rally behind Captain Moroni are liminal persons. They are opposed by the kingmen—non-liminal persons who desire a highly structured society. Mormon's son Moroni is a liminal wanderer who remains "alone to write the sad tale of the destruction of [his] people" (Morm. 8:3).

Although a king, Benjamin is liminal in that he minimizes his status, reminding the people he has labored with his own hands for his support and identifying himself as a beggar before God. Similarly, Alma gives up a judgeship to preach as a statusless missionary.

Victor Turner uses the term *communitas* to define a group of liminal persons, such as those on a pilgrimage, who bond together in an unstructured or rudimentarily structured community. This community is marked by spontaneity, freedom, and

equality.<sup>4</sup> In the Book of Mormon, an ideal *communitas* is found in the disciples of Jesus who "had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another" (3 Ne. 26:19). Likewise, when the Nephites and Lamanites following Christ's visit are converted,

*there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.*

*And they had all things common about them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. . . .*

*There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God. (4 Ne. 1:2-3, 17)*

Liminal places include, appropriately, the edge of the waters of Mormon where people go through the liminal action of being baptized (going into and out of another element). Other important liminal places or objects in the Book of Mormon are wildernesses, tents, islands, pits, towers, rivers, roads, mountain tops, and temples (which, as with mountain tops, are between heaven and earth). Figurative liminality is found in veils, objects hidden up or vanishing, gates, abysses, holes, edges, and twinkling.

Liminal actions or events are transitions into or across boundaries. "To cross the threshold," van Gennep says, "is to unite oneself with a new world." In the case of entering a temple, it is to move "between the profane and sacred worlds."<sup>5</sup> Purifications, such as Christian baptism, "constitute rites of separation from previous surroundings; there follow rites of incorporation [such as] . . . a shared meal" or naming.<sup>6</sup>

In the Book of Mormon, these liminal actions include going across water (the Lehighites and the Jaredites); going into or out of prison (Alma and Amulek, the brothers Nephi and Lehi); falling into and coming out of trances (Alma, Lamoni, Ammon); escapes (Lehi's family, the people of

Limhi); conversion from a world of wickedness to one of righteousness (Alma); initiations (covenant making by King Benjamin's people); and transformations (Zeezrom's change from a cunning lawyer to a humble missionary).

Conversely, nonliminal persons and places assert structure and classes. Opposed to liminality is that which, in Turner's words, "holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions."<sup>7</sup> King Noah is a perfect example of a nonliminal person. Taxing his people heavily, he builds a spacious palace and a throne in the midst of it "which was of fine wood and was ornamented with gold and silver and with precious things." For his high priests, he provides seats "which were above all the other seats" and which "he did ornament with pure gold." His tower is built high so he can proudly "look over all the land round about" (Mosiah 11:9, 11, 12).

Those who occupy the great and spacious building in Lehi's dream are nonliminal. The building itself is defined as the "vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men" (1 Ne. 12:18). The people in it wear clothes denoting their status: "their manner of dress was exceedingly fine," and they mock those who partake of the fruit of the tree of life (1 Ne. 8:27). Subsequently, severe structuring of society, with its accompanying abuse of the poor and humble, is evidenced by the wearing of "fine-twined linens" and the like. The Zoramites exemplify a classed society; they cast out their poor as pariahs, a group to whom Alma is able to preach successfully his message of faith and love. Two centuries after the coming of Christ, the breakdown of Nephite society begins with some prosperous people being

*lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world.*

*And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them.*

*And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain, and began to deny the true church of Christ. (4 Ne. 1:24-26)*

On the other hand, the great covenant-making which King Benjamin sets up for his assembled people is a thoroughly liminal experience. The people stay in tents, linking up with their ancestors in observing what John Tvedtnes calls a Nephite Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>8</sup> They have come to a liminal place, the temple, and they undergo a transformation.

One can understand better the nature and significance of liminality in this experience by considering it as a great Year Rite. Hugh Nibley says that in the ancient East,

*all things center in a single supreme rite, performed in its completeness only at a particular place, the shrine that stands at the center of the earth, and a particular time, the New Year's day when all things are born and the earth is created anew. Since everyone was required by law to be present at this great event, to do homage to the king and receive his blessing for the new age, the result was a tremendous assembly. . . . The New Year was the birthday of the human race and its rites dramatized the creation of the world; all who would be found in "the Book of Life opened at the creation of the World" must necessarily attend.<sup>9</sup>*

Nibley finds thirty-six ways in which King Benjamin's gathering is a Year Rite. Besides the time (New Year) and place (the temple), these include liminal elements such as giving the people a name, providing a vivid form of instruction that unfolds to view the mysteries of God, and renunciation—even reversal—of the conventional claims of kingship.

At the core of this Nephite Year Rite is a spiritual transformation of the people. King Benjamin urges his auditors to humble themselves and "become as little children"—very much liminal persons without class or status. He explains:

*For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)*

He calls, in other words, for repentance, saying that "none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent" (Mosiah 3:21). There is an appropriate connection between repentance and ancient New Year rites, according to Gabriel Josipovici:

*In the Hebrew Bible, and in Judaism till the present day, the term for repentance is testuvah, a turning. You have gone astray in this way or that and now you recognize and admit this and turn back to the right way. The great series of feasts connected with the new year culminates in the Day of Atonement, when, having repented fully, you are forgiven and so can start afresh with the slate wiped clean.<sup>10</sup>*

King Benjamin stirs his people to awaken to a sense of their nothingness and their worthless and fallen state, to understand the atonement of Christ, and to enter into a covenant with God to do his will and keep his commandments. When they enter into this covenant, they receive a rebirth and a new name: Because of the covenant they have made, Benjamin says to his people:

*ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. (Mosiah 5:7-8)*

Self-acknowledged as beggars before God, they have formed, at least for a while, a *communitas* or community of liminal persons.

To be on the threshold or to cross boundaries is not necessarily a positive experience. Liminality—"that which is neither this nor that and yet is both"<sup>11</sup>—is by its nature ambiguous. Fire, a liminal element, can purify or destroy; a visitation by heavenly powers can terrify rather than bless. This is especially true in respect to the cataclysmic events that occur at the time of the crucifixion.

The events in Third Nephi culminate liminal imagery and events. The very structures of the earth are shaken and changed as violent earthquakes and accompanying fires and whirlwinds create destruction. After hearing a voice from heaven, a multitude gathered at the temple see "a Man descending out of heaven" who declares himself to be Jesus Christ, "the light and the life of the world" (3 Ne. 11:8, 11). This mediator between heaven and earth parts the veil and allows the people to touch him and hear him. He calls on the people to undergo a transformational process: "Ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name" (3 Ne. 11:37), he says; he teaches them to be one, a *communitas*; then he administers the sacrament unto them—a sacred shared meal which van Gennep would call a rite of incorporation.

Earlier, the voice of Jesus was heard telling about the deaths of the unrighteous; later, Jesus in person stands before the people as an affirmation of the resurrection—which is the great transition from death to eternal life. The "keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel" (2 Ne. 9:41), Jacob had taught, and now the Holy One of Israel personally covenants with his people. He affirms his power to effect transitions by healing all their sick, opening the eyes of their blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, and raising a man from the dead (3 Ne. 16:15). His parting words include an admonition to "Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Ne. 27:20).

In the book of Ether which follows soon after Third Nephi and which serves as a microcosm of the whole Book of Mormon, the threshold between heaven and earth is again made transparent. Here Moroni speaks of those like the Brother of Jared

*whose faith was exceedingly strong, even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad. (Ether 12:19)*

While the book of Ether contains an account of an ancient people, it speaks to a future one in richly liminal language:

*Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, [Moroni quotes Jesus as saying,] and I will show unto you the greater things, the knowledge which is hid up because of unbelief.*

*Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness of mind, then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world from you— . . .*

*And then shall my revelations which I have caused to be written by my servant John be unfolded in the eyes of all the people. (Ether 4:13-16)*

One of the chief "marvelous things," Moroni is told, is the record Moroni is involved in writing. It shall come forth "out of the earth," Moroni says, ". . . in a day when it shall be said that miracles are done away; and it shall come even as if one should speak from the dead" (Morm. 8:26). The book thus is "betwixt and between" the dead and the living; of earthly origins, it asserts that it contains the revelations of God; a liminal "voice from the dust," it speaks today with power and beauty.

The language of the title page (which also is the book's preface) marks God's dealings with the fathers (heaven contacting earth), presents transformational covenants (such as baptism), and convinces that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—the mediator between heaven and earth. The last assertion of the book resolves liminal tensions: the earthly person can be made heavenly through being "sanctified in Christ by the grace of God"; in the resurrection, Jehovah is "the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead" (Moro. 10:34).

In Michelangelo's painting of the creation of Adam, birth comes from God's reaching to man. Rebirth, as the Book of Mormon develops it, is initiated by a person's reaching to God and meeting God's outstretched "arm of mercy." It completes and perfects the meeting at the threshold between heaven and earth. This process is described by the

voice of the Lord, speaking to the Nephite people who are spared during the destruction of their cities: "If ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life," he says regarding their part. For his part, he says, "Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me" (3 Ne. 9:14). This, ultimately, is the sacred liminal connection.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1969), 95.

<sup>3</sup>In *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 11, van Gennep defines a rite of transition as being a liminal rite between a rite of separation and one of incorporation. Some examples of liminal rites are initiations, "rites of attachment to the deity," and those "enacting death in one condition and resurrection in another" (12-13).

<sup>4</sup>Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 49, 202.

<sup>5</sup>Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 20.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 20, 62.

<sup>7</sup>Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 47.

<sup>8</sup>John Tvedtnes, "The Nephite Feast of Tabernacles," in *Tinkling Cymbals: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley*, edited by John W. Welch (Los Angeles: n.pub., 1978).

<sup>9</sup>Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 243-44.

<sup>10</sup>Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 242.

<sup>11</sup>Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 96.

# Abriding the Records of the Zoramite Mission: Mormon as Historian

Steven L. Olsen<sup>1</sup>

ALMA'S MISSION TO THE ZORAMITES occupies a crucial place in Mormon's record of Nephites at Zarahemla (Alma 31-35). It is located between extended accounts of relatively successful ecclesiastical and military missions (Alma 5-27, 43-62). A detailed examination of this text reveals Mormon's purposes in incorporating it into his abridgment, as well as something of the nature of the record he was creating and of the literary task he had undertaken.

Mormon divides his abridgment of this account into three parts. He identifies Alma's motivations for undertaking the mission and strategies to ensure its successful completion. He details Alma's execution of that plan. And he evaluates the success of the mission as a commentary on the moral condition of Nephite society.

## Setting the Stage

Mormon introduces the Zoramites in the conclusion to his narrative about the apostate, Korihor (Alma 30). The text mentions that after Korihor had confessed his iniquity and after his followers had reconverted to the gospel, he went begging for his sustenance among the Zoramites. While going from house to house, he was "run down and trodden down, even until he was dead" (Alma 30:59). By this narrative bridge, Mormon introduces the Zoramites through an action that signals the ignoble end of an individual apostate and the reprehensible moral conduct of an apostate group (see Mosiah 2). This group would ultimately prove more dangerous to the Church and more destructive to individual spirituality than Korihor. Aware of this condition of apostasy, Alma organized a mission to the Zoramites.

Mormon attributes to Alma three motivations for his mission. The first was spiritual. The record mentions that the Zoramites had fallen into a state of apostasy and had become idolatrous (v. 1). Thus Alma did "sicken because of the iniquity of the people" (v. 1) and was "exceeding sorrowful" (v. 2). He was, above all, concerned for the welfare of their souls. Alma's second concern was tactical. The Zoramites had physically separated themselves from the believers in Christ (vv. 2-3). As a result, the spirituality of the believers per se could not directly influence the Zoramites to return to righteousness. Their successful reconversion could result only from direct intervention. The third motivation was political. Mormon observes, "The Nephites greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites" (v. 4). Alma's mission was undertaken partly to prevent this unholy alliance. Motivated by these concerns, Alma concluded that,

*the preaching of the word [of God] . . . had a more powerful effect upon the mind of the people than the sword, or anything else—therefore Alma thought . . . [the missionaries] should try the virtue of the word of God. (v. 5)*

Mormon's introduction lastly specifies the apostate practice to be the focus of his narrative. Although he mentions that the Zoramites "would not observe to keep the commandments of God" (v. 9) and that "they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances" (v. 11)—the only point of apostasy Mormon specifically mentions is that they did not "observe the performances of the church, to continue in prayer and supplication to God daily, that they might not enter into temptation" (v. 10). By this emphasis, Mormon foreshadows "prayer and supplication" as the focus of this portion of his abridgment.



## Reconstructing the Mission

Consistent with his stated purpose for abridging Alma's account, Mormon develops his narrative around the apostate practices of "prayer and supplication." To do so, he cites verbatim the prayers of the Zoramites and of Alma, and he offers simple, direct, and systematic commentary on each. Mormon sets off the apostate prayer by the words "astonishment" and "astonished" (vv. 12, 19), suggesting that this prayer serves as a foil against Alma's true worship. To make this contrast more poignant, Mormon ascribes this reaction not to his own editorial voice but to the missionaries who experience the apostate practice.

Although the rest of Alma 31 is chronologically ordered, its details are structured specifically to reinforce Mormon's editorial purpose. He includes in this historical vignette only details which serve that specific purpose. Mormon emphasizes, first of all, the exclusivity of Zoramite worship. This worship occurred only at a specified time (v. 12) and place (v. 13). Only one person could worship at a time; the worshipper was separated from the main body of believers (vv. 13-14); and only one fixed prayer was allowed (v. 20). The exclusivity of worship is further reflected in the fact that during the rest of the week this prayer had no effect upon their daily lives (v. 23).

Mormon also emphasizes the static and elitist nature of Zoramite worship. The prayer was fixed in both its delivery and contents. The worshipper had to mount the holy stand alone, "stretch forth his hands toward heaven, and cry with a loud voice" (v. 14). The one prayer that everyone offered expressed the belief that the Zoramites were "chosen" to the condemnation of all other people (vv. 16-17, 22) and thanked their god that "their hearts were not stolen away to believe in things to come" (v. 22). This belief specifically refers to the coming of Christ, which had earlier been prophesied to them (see vv. 8, 17) but which, ironically, "they knew nothing about" (v. 22). Mormon thus reveals the spiritual ignorance to which apostasy has led the Zoramites.

Through the selective use of specific language, figures of speech, and historical details, Mormon represents Zoramite worship as restrictive and static. The who, what, where, why, and how of worship all seek to limit artificially individual and group spirituality. Mormon then identifies four consequences of this apostate practice. He indicates, that the Zoramites had become "a wicked and perverse people" (v. 24). They had become materialistic, having "their hearts . . . set upon gold, and upon silver, and upon all manner of fine goods" (v. 24). Mormon mentions also their vanity and pride (v. 25). Having witnessed this gross state of apostasy, Alma was moved to lift "up his voice to heaven" in prayer (v. 26).

Mormon includes Alma's entire prayer as a powerful contrast to the vain recitations of the Zoramites. His prayer was consistent with the "performances of the church" (v. 10), being a "supplication to God." It sought divine assistance to accomplish a righteous purpose: "O Lord, wilt thou grant unto us that we may have success in bringing [the Zoramites] again unto thee in Christ" (v. 34). In contrast to the exclusivity of the Zoramite worship, Alma's invocation took place in the midst of his brethren and in behalf of both them and the Zoramites. Despite the apostate practices of the Zoramites, Alma recognized that "their souls are precious, and many of them are our brethren" (v. 35).

Alma's prayer focused on specific details and requests. He identified the points of "gross wickedness" needing correction: pride, hypocrisy, vanity, materialism, elitism, and atheism (vv. 27-29). He followed this inventory with a specific request: that the missionaries be strengthened beyond their normal capacities and comforted in their trials in order to accomplish their divine mission (vv. 30-33). The prayer ended with a clear declaration of the mission's objective: "that we may bring these, our brethren, again to thee" (vv. 34-35). The prayer of Alma demonstrated his certain faith in and loving relationship with the Lord. Unlike the Zoramites who actively sought to deny the reality of Christ, Alma was anxious that both he and his companions be

comforted in Christ (vv. 31-32) and that the Zoramites be brought "again unto [God] in Christ" (v. 34).

Consistent with his analysis of Zoramite worship, Mormon then identifies four consequences of Alma's prayer. First of all, immediately after his prayer, Alma blessed his companions and "they were filled with the Holy Ghost" (v. 36). His prayer sought divine blessings for his companions, and subsequent actions demonstrated the sincerity of this request. Second, the missionaries "did separate themselves from one another" (v. 37), seeking individually to perform their collective mission to restore their brethren to the gospel. The prayer and the mission both sought to unify, not divide, and to integrate, not discriminate, by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Third, the missionaries were not concerned with their material sustenance and comfort but relied on the Lord who "provided for them that they should hunger not, neither should they thirst" (v. 38). Finally, Mormon mentions that the Lord strengthened his servants "that they should suffer no manner of afflictions, save it were swallowed up in the joy of Christ" (v. 38). He also ends this poignant analysis by commenting on why Alma's prayer constituted true worship: "Now this was according to the prayer of Alma; and this because he prayed in faith" (v. 38).

In Alma 31, Mormon selects and organizes material from the records of Alma's mission to comment on the state of Nephite righteousness. He does so by means of a simple yet direct and systematic contrast between the worship of two groups, one apostate and the other faithful. The focus of the contrast is their respective prayers, included verbatim in the text. Then through the actions and observations of the missionaries and his own selective but powerful editorial commentary, Mormon contrasts the motivations and consequences of the two forms of worship. Alma 31 functions not only as a powerful commentary on righteousness drawn from the historical narrative, it also foreshadows the doctrinal discourses Mormon includes from the rest of Alma's mission records. For example, Mormon's

declaration that the efficacy of Alma's prayer was a product of his faith (v. 38) directly preceeds Alma's powerful discourse on faith (Alma 32).

In addition, other teachings in this narrative correct apostate beliefs and practices specifically detailed in Alma 31. The missionaries taught that true worship should not be limited to a single time and place (33:4-11), that it confirms a belief in the Son of God (33:14-23), that the atonement of Jesus Christ provides the only sure hope of salvation (34:1-17), that prayers can address a wide variety of concerns and need not be fixed (34:17-27), and that true worship includes having charity for one's fellow humans (34:28-29).

## Commenting on the Mission

In Alma 35, Mormon evaluates further the state of Nephite righteousness by having Alma reflect on the mission, in terms of his three initial motivations for undertaking the mission. On the basis of Alma's political and tactical motivations, the mission failed. Unrepentant Zoramites join with and incite Lamanites to wage war on reconverted Zoramites (vv. 10-15). This conflict is the first in the series of devastating battles which become the narrative focus of the last half of the Book of Alma (see Alma 43-62).

In terms of Alma's spiritual motivation, the mission was also largely unsuccessful. Although many Zoramites were brought to repentance, Mormon specifically observes that,

*Alma, being grieved for the iniquity of his people . . . and seeing that the hearts of the people began to wax hard, and that they began to be offended because of the strictness of the word, his heart was exceeding sorrowful. (v. 15, cf Alma 31:1)*

Unfortunately, the "word of God" had not had a greater effect on the people than the sword (Alma 31:5), and Alma's righteous desires for undertaking the mission remained largely unrealized.

This portion of Mormon's abridgment thus serves as far more than a powerful moral or theological lesson. By skillfully abridging the records of Alma's mission, Mormon sets the stage for his ac-

count of the disintegration of Nephite society, which began with the wars brought on by dissent and apostasy and culminated in the natural disasters immediately preceeding Christ's visit to the promised land.

Although Mormon makes reference to important evangelical and ecclesiastical missions during the century between the Zoramite mission and the coming of Christ (e.g., Alma 43:1-2), the historical narrative includes little specific information about the church as a force for social order and moral virtue among the Nephites. The government becomes corrupt and increasingly ineffective as an agent for public good, and the responsibility for securing the Nephite social order devolves upon the military (Alma 59-62; Hel. 1-3). The locus of righteousness in the promised land transfers from the Nephites to converted Lamanites. The efforts of these righteous Lamanites to reclaim apostate Nephites are largely rejected (Hel. 5-6, 13-15). Eventually, only famine can get the people to repent; and then when the people reject even the redeeming effect of natural disasters, those disasters destroy nearly the entire civilization (3 Ne. 8-10). After the failure of Alma's mission, only Christ's visit keeps the second half of the abridgment from documenting one steady and certain path to total destruction. Mormon strategically locates Alma's mission within the Book of Mormon narrative to signal the beginning of this dramatic decline.

### **The Role of Structure in the Historical Narrative**

The full meaning of Alma 31 and of Alma's mission to the Zoramites cannot be comprehended solely from an examination of the contents (i.e., historical, doctrinal, geographical, biographical, social, political, military, and other details) of the records. It is essential, as well, to analyze the methods by which Mormon organized and thereby interpreted those records himself.

The organization, or structure, of Mormon's abridgment of Alma's mission to the Zoramites depends to a great extent upon literary conventions.

Mormon uses the various languages of introspection, narrative, dialogue, and observation to create a sense of the dramatic crisis of the mission, while his restrained but strategically placed and powerfully worded commentary provides the reader with enough emotional distance from the events to grasp more fully the meaning of the lessons being taught. In addition, the order in which Mormon includes details in the abridgment and their juxtaposition, contrast, harmony, or other relation with other kinds of details creates greater insight into the subject than if a straight, paint-by-the-numbers historical documentary been Mormon's intent.

Through these literary conventions, the narrative reveals the degree to which the human and the divine, the historical and the spiritual, are integrated in the lives of the Nephites, as seen through the eyes of one particularly inspired literary craftsman. If Alma 31 is indicative of the writing in the rest of the Book of Mormon, we see how finely and completely the messages in this volume of scripture can be articulated. It is unlikely that this level of literary craftsmanship is accidental. More reasonable are the conclusions that Mormon consciously selected and organized material for his sacred history from the voluminous records in the Nephite archives, that he was guided in his writing by a firm understanding of God's purposes in having him abridge the "records of the Nephites" (Title Page), and that Mormon came to this understanding through his obedience to the call of a prophet of God to write (W. of Morm. 1:5-7; Morm. 1:1-4; 5:12-14; 6:6).

### **Notes**

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# Telling It Slant: Aiming for Truth in Contemporary Mormon Literature

William Mulder<sup>1</sup>

IN HIS "HISTORIC NOTES OF LIFE and Letters in New England," Emerson relates how

*Dr. Channing took counsel in 1840 with George Ripley, to the point whether it were possible to bring cultivated, thoughtful people together, and make society that deserved the name. . . . Dr. Channing repaired to Dr. Warren's house on the appointed evening, with large thoughts which he wished to open. He found a well-chosen assembly of gentlemen variously distinguished; there was mutual greeting and introduction, and they were chatting agreeably on indifferent matters and drawing gently towards their great expectation, when a side-door opened, the whole company streamed in to an oyster supper, crowned by excellent wines; and so ended the first attempt to establish aesthetic society in Boston.<sup>2</sup>*

Sometime later these New England intellectuals did a little better: they invited what Emerson described as "a limited party of ladies and gentlemen," including Margaret Fuller; and, as we well know, they went on to make history as the Transcendental Club.

I don't know how AML originated, or what dissipations await us this evening, but we have good literary antecedents, perhaps even more directly in what was happening in Nauvoo that very year, where, if I'm not mistaken, they organized the Nauvoo Literary Society.<sup>3</sup> In any case, I feel at home here. A mother in Walter Kim's title story "My Hard Bargain" tells her son she was a Mormon once, for a year, and she doesn't want him to get any wrong ideas about them. "They're good people," she says, "and they stick together, they call each other brother and sister. It creates a nice atmosphere."<sup>4</sup> This is a

goodly company, as goodly as Chaucer's band on their way to Canterbury. In fantasy I can see us as latter-day pilgrims, everyone a storyteller, on our way to conference (*April* conference, of course—"Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote . . ."). Who would be our gentle knight, our dainty prioress, our clerk of Oxenforde, our nun's priest, our reeve or merchant, our lusty miller (don't all turn at once to Levi), and who would be our Wife of Bath (or does *Saturday's Voyeur* have the edge here)? We surely have no pardoner; no Mormon writer so cynical, I believe, and, God forbid, no summoner, unless he's been sent by the Brethren. Tellers of chronicle, legend, romance, allegory, confession, fabliau, folktale—all would be there, because Mormon life is no less rich than was medieval life; and as Bert Wilson reminds us in his "In Praise of Ourselves," we each have a story to tell.<sup>5</sup> To conclude my fantasy, in this company, given my assignment, I'm like the Parson, bringing up the rear with his endless tale in prose. So I had better begin.

In preparation for this evening, I have done some arduous reading and rereading of what by now amounts to more than Harvard's fabled five-foot shelf of classics, in this instance a shelf of contemporary Mormon writing, some of it indeed classic; and more than once, Hawthorne's complaint about "the damned mob of scribbling women" ran through my head (in my case, read "Mormons" for "women"). But I confess to complete absorption in what I read and a measure of astonishment at its high quality. (I am speaking, now and throughout, of course, of works of the imagination, not of official literature.) I can hardly keep up with current production, let alone *catch* up with what's been happening since *Exponent II* and *Dialogue* and

*Sunstone* and *BYU Studies* came on the scene; and Signature Books and Peregrine Smith gave us an alternative press, along with some daring departures on the part of the University of Utah Press. And that's just the fruit of one half of Mormonism's two cultures (to borrow a phrase from C. P. Snow)—the critical, reflective, thinking half; there's a lot more out there being produced by the other half—the uncritical, the unreflective, the unthinking, the True Believers (in Eric Hoffer's meaning), as a visit to Deseret Book or Seagull Book and Tape stores sadly testifies. From the thinking half we have further evidence of a kind of second renaissance in Mormon letters in such collections as *A Believing People*, *Greening Wheat*, and *Harvest*,<sup>6</sup> not quite the standard works but almost as familiar.

I'm not foolish enough to address the topic originally announced, a topic as broad as "The State of Mormon Literature," a title too inert, on the one hand, as in "lying in state," and too pontifical on the other, as in "the state of the Union." Yet, it may be time for a Mormon equivalent of Kenneth B. Murdock's little book on *Literature and Theology in Colonial New England*,<sup>7</sup> a landmark work which gave colonial literature a belated place in the sun as Murdock demonstrated how Puritan religious thought and experience, against the background of seventeenth-century English literature, found expression in their poetry, their histories and biographies, and their personal narratives—not a bad model for our own effort to see the connections between Mormon life and letters. But Murdock had a book to expand on it, and I have an hour. Besides, Eugene England covered the ground in his Charles Redd lecture ten years ago, a commanding survey he called "The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years."<sup>8</sup> More than an outline of Mormon literary history, it was an interpretation, a critique, and a charge, reminding me in its timeliness of Ellery Channing's great essay, "Remarks on National Literature,"<sup>9</sup> in 1830, a time of heightened nationalism in the United States—and the very year Mormonism (and Emily Dickinson) were born. It strikes me that Mormon writers (again the thinking half of our two cultures)

are equally self-conscious in striving to define and establish their literary identity today.<sup>10</sup> So, Gene's lecture has done our work for us up to 1980, as his continuing reviews and essays have been doing for the '80s, another productive decade in Mormon literature.

So what is left? Well, perhaps a brief retrospective look at a Symposium on Mormon Culture held as the plenary session of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters in Logan in 1952, some forty years ago, thirty years before Gene's prospectus. On that occasion, Juanita Brooks of Dixie College presented a community portrait of St. George, Leonard Arrington of USAC spoke on "Trends in Mormon Economic Policy," Gaylon Caldwell of BYU presented a paper on "The Development of Mormon Ethics," and I, a still unordained Harvard ABD teaching at the University of Utah, presumed to put "Mormonism and Literature" in historical perspective. Symposium papers circulated in mimeographed form for a while, eventually finding their way into various publications. Mine got buried in the Notes and Comments column of the *Western Humanities Review* in the Winter of 1954/55, where Karl Keller noticed it some years later; and, in a provocative article of his own on "The Delusions [italics mine] of a Mormon Literature" in *Dialogue's* special literary issue in 1969, gave it an approving footnote for its introduction to what he described as "the paucity and possibilities of a Mormon literature."<sup>11</sup> Five years later, Dick Cracroft and Neal Lambert resurrected the piece in their pathbreaking collection *A Believing People*, the essay positioned not too uncomfortably between Orson F. Whitney's 1888 *Contributor* essay on "Home Literature" and P. A. Christensen's "Mormonism: An Eternal Quest," taken from his *All in a Teacher's Day*. Not bad company really.

Now, after that prologue I owe you a few paragraphs from that hardy perennial from which we can go on to see what has happened since:

*Mormonism began with a book, and the Latter-day Saints, like the English reformers in the time of King James with their brand new translation of the Bible, became pre-eminently the people of a book.*

Whether it be regarded as an authentic ancient record or as a highly contemporary document, the Book of Mormon is nevertheless a fact and a force. Mark Twain may have called it chloroform in print, but from the beginning it has fed the imagination and, aside from being an original contribution to American literature, it has been the source of countless other contributions, at all levels: from amateur Book of Mormon pageants produced by loyal congregations to such sophisticated products as Leroy J. Robertson's *Book of Mormon Oratorio* and Cyrus Dallin's heroic figure of Moroni atop the Salt Lake Temple. The Book of Mormon has added words to the language, dotted the map from New York to Utah with unique place names, and given believers a gallery of heroes rivaling the Old Testament. Not least, it has added to native literature a distinct literary type, the Nephite legend, by now an approved subject for Ph.D. dissertations. The use of the book for theological purposes seems often synthetic; it goes unread in countless Mormon homes; but its story, its symbolism, have persisted now for over a century to become the unconscious, uncritical inheritance of several generations, and no writer treating the Mormon theme can overlook it.

It is not without significance that Mormonism, beginning with a book, had to make its appeal to a literate following. The proselyte had to be able to read. The Saints, be it remembered, equipped their ideal community not only with a temple and a bishop's storehouse, but with a printing press, and they appointed not only elders and bishops and teachers as their ministering officers, but an official printer to the Church. Even Winter Quarters had a press where was struck off what is believed to be the first printing west of the Mississippi, an epistle from the Twelve to the scattered Saints. And a people uprooted, on the move across Iowa and the great plains, carried Webster's blue-backed speller with them and heard their youngsters diligently recite their lessons in the dust of rolling wagons. Once established in Salt Lake Valley, they made an urgent request for a federal appropriation of \$5,000 for a territorial library; and within short years they were promoting lyceums, a Polysophical Society, a Deseret Dramatic Association, a Universal Scientific Society, a Library Association, and an Academy of Art.

It is not without significance that Joseph Smith himself, whether viewed as the divinely inspired translator or as a transcendental genius, was the

product of a literate background, both in terms of an average New England schooling with its available village culture and of his own family, particularly the maternal side; his grandfather Solomon Mack had published in chapbook form a highly readable spiritual autobiography. It is not surprising that around the Prophet's millennial standard gathered school teachers and college graduates, men as gifted as Oliver Cowdery and Willard Richards, the Pratt brothers—Parley and Orson, Orson Spencer, John Taylor, William Phelps, Lorenzo Snow, and his talented sister Eliza, persuasive orators and fluent writers who founded and edited capable periodicals like the *Millennial Star* in England, the *Messenger* and *Advocate* in Kirtland, the *Evening and Morning Star* in Independence, the *Mormon* in New York, the *Seer* in Washington, the *Luminary* in St. Louis, the *Nauvoo Neighbor* and the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo, and the *Frontier Guardian* in Kanesville—some of them brilliant, all of them fearless and eloquent. Their tradition, militant and aspiring, persisted in the columns of the early *Deseret News* and in the pages of the *Contributor* and the *Young Woman's Journal*, to give way at last to genteel moralizing, a tone and manner characteristic of today, with persecution subsided and the dream collapsed.

Clearly, Mormonism had literate beginnings which developed early into a distinctive literature, a rich legacy forgotten in the mediocrity of present-day Mormon expression. That legacy, to be sure, must be sought in more than belles lettres; it must be sought and recognized in the beginnings of literature, the raw materials out of which pure letters rise; in an oral tradition of salty anecdote and imaginative legend, in colorful and vigorous sermons that make the *Journal of Discourses* such fascinating reading, in personal diaries and letters which reveal the soul-searching triumphs and defeats of the convert, immigrant, and settler, in hymns breathing aspiration and desire—together, intensely moving expressions of a faith fed by millennial dreams and nourished by irrigation. These, a subliterate, if you will, come closer to exhibiting the genius of Mormonism as a force and movement than the more formal literary types thrice removed from their original inspiration. It is in these themes and modes, these beginnings of literature, we should attempt to find what is, or has been, characteristic of Mormon literature and what may hold promise for the future. . . .

*The burden of creating a Mormon literature in the future rests as heavily on the reader as on the writer. If a look at the Church counter in the local bookstore fills us with dismay and we accuse Mormon writers of having thrown away their pens in favor of paste pot and scissors, we may well inquire whether a supine readership is after all not to blame. One of the major threats to Mormon literary growth is what may be called the uneducated literacy of the Church membership, a greater danger perhaps than downright illiteracy because adult minds, capable of growth, have been arrested, in the official literature, at the level of the Sunday School lesson and never treated to the stimulation of the mature writing the whole Mormon tradition should have ripened by our time. Mormonism is perfectly capable of its own Christian Century and Commentary. Scores of Church members are writing with distinction in their special fields, but the official literature does not recognize them because of another major threat to Mormon literary growth: the attempt to endow certain writings, however mediocre in style and spirit, with an authority extraneous to the work itself. The official preface is fatal to Mormon literary production because it invests unworthy works with false prestige while on the other hand better work not so recognized goes unread. Literature should establish its own authority. The best of Joseph Smith's revelations, linguistically speaking, have the authority of good literature; they are literature converted into authority when they speak truth unforgettably. Not "Was it inspired?" but "Is it inspiring?" is the better touchstone of authenticity. . . .*

*Mormon literature will move toward the promise of its highly articulate beginnings when Mormon readers demand of Mormon writers authentic voices, whether in fiction, in history, in biography, or in missionary tract—the authority of good writing, of truths made memorable.<sup>12</sup>*

A document so dated calls for a sequel, an account of what's happened in the forty years since that symposium and since those literary ancestors of the 1940s (Sorensen, Whipple, Kennelly) Ed Geary calls "Mormondom's lost generation,"<sup>13</sup> to see whether contemporary Mormon writers, like the historians writing the new Mormon history, have brought new viewpoints and professional skills to their work as they move beyond the clichés of Mor-

mon faith and experience. We want to know how, in fiction, for example, we get from Nephi Anderson's *The Romance of a Missionary* to Franklin Fisher's *Bones* and Levi Peterson's *Backslider*; how, in poetry, we get from Eliza R. Snow's "O My Father" to Carol Lynn Pearson's *Mother Wove the Morning* and Emma Lou Thayne's *Poems of Survival* and Clinton Larson's "To a Dying Girl"; how, in drama, we get from *Saturday's Warrior* to Tom Rogers's *Huebener*; we want to know how, in personal narrative and reminiscence, we get from *The Boys of Springtown* to Ed Geary's *Goodbye to Poplarhaven* and Virginia Sorensen's *Where Nothing Is Long Ago* and Wayne Carver's "Plain City: Portrait of a Mormon Village"; we want to know how, in short fiction, we get from the stories in the *Era*, the *Ensign*, and the *Relief Society Magazine* to the stories by Linda Sillitoe, Pauline Mortensen, Judith Freeman, and Phyllis Barber; the stories by Doug Thayer, Don Marshall, Neal Chandler, Walter Kirn, Michael Fillerup, and John Bennion; we want to know, in criticism, how we get from John A. Widtsoe's dismissal of Virginia Sorensen's *A Little Lower Than the Angels* to Bruce Jorgensen's illuminations of *The Evening and the Morning*; and finally, we want to know how, in stories for children and young adults, we get from *The Juvenile Instructor* and *The Children's Friend* to Ann Cannon's *Cal Cameron by Day, Spider-Man by Night*. You get the idea. You can fill in the blanks, as I would love to were there world enough and time and without the risk of declining further into a mere roll call of our cloud of literary witnesses.

As I see it, there have been two, possibly three, palpable developments in contemporary Mormon writing (again, by the thinking half of the two cultures): first, an emboldened treatment of a broadened subject matter, going far beyond, in time, the warmed-over servings of the pioneer past and, in space, beyond the confines of the Wasatch, the newer interest centering as much on the contemporary urban as the traditional rural scene, whether in Zion or among the Saints of the diaspora and embracing the cultures encountered in mission fields abroad.

And, as part of this breadth and boldness comes an appreciation of the androgynous in men and women and an honest handling of sexuality, whether in married or forbidden love, the expression of it as poignant and painful as on occasion it is beautiful.

A second development is the writers' realization that in treating Mormon themes "technique is discovery," Mark Schorer's term for that reconciliation of form and content that makes the *way* a thing is said ultimately *what* is said.<sup>14</sup> It is that triumph of style that transforms the ideas of "the Declaration of Independence from platitudes into imperishable prose.

A third development is a growing body of literary criticism as a necessary adjunct to that artistic advance in contemporary Mormon letters with, as corollary, a possible key to a Mormon aesthetic in Karl Keller's dictum that "not art filling a religious purpose, but religion succeeding in an esthetic way" should be the aim.<sup>15</sup> In this way Mormon literature, like any other literature, can become, as Pound puts it, "news that *stays* news."<sup>16</sup> In short, today's Mormon writers are telling the truth, their truth, but telling it slant.

*Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—  
Success in Circuit lies [.]  
Too bright for our infirm Delight  
The Truth's superb surprise [.]  
As Lightning to the Children eased  
With explanation kind  
The Truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind—*<sup>17</sup>

"God's altar," says the Preface to the *Bay Psalm Book*, "needs not our polishings,"<sup>18</sup> yet the altar, which I take to be a metaphor for divine truth, that Truth that dazzles, may be sighted, if it is to be seen at all, from as many angles as talents allow until that day we "get our eyes put out" by that waylaying light Dickinson fears is "Too bright for our infirm Delight."

"The Law," says a Hebrew proverb, "speaks in the tongues of men." Thomas Adams, the seventeenth-century English preacher known in his day as "the prose Shakespeare of Puritan divines," declared that,

*God doth sometimes draw men to him . . . by their own delights and studies . . . as fishermen fishes, with such baits as may be somewhat agreeable to them . . . .  
Doth Augustine love eloquence? Ambrose shall catch him at a sermon.*

Adams wanted his hearers to "conceive things more spiritual and remote by passions nearer to sense."<sup>19</sup> The American Puritans themselves practiced a range of literary strategies, from William Bradford's plain style to Edward Taylor's colonial baroque, to prepare the heart for that grace they hoped would prove irresistible. Cotton Mather, despite some misgivings about the immorality of Homer's gods, expanded the range of permissible literary allusion from the biblical to the classical and, in his handbook for the ministry, whom he did not wish to have "a soul that shall be wholly unpoetical," advised his young charges to peruse Horace's *Art of Poetry* and to discern "the beauties and rare antiquities of an Homer and a Virgil. . . . Every man," he tells them, "will have his own style which will distinguish him as much as his gait."<sup>20</sup>

So, my narrowed objective in what remains of this evening is to see by what literary circuitry contemporary Mormon writers seem to be achieving their successes as they approach God's altar. And there are as many slants or strategies, of course, as there are forms and styles.

There's the slant of form itself—the forms of fiction, poetry and drama, of sermon and meditation, of personal narrative and the personal essay, of folktale and oral telling, and the multiplied possibilities of structure within those forms. There's the slant of voice and tone and point of view; the slant of mood and mode, of humor and satire, parable and allegory, irony and anger. And there's the slant in all the possibilities of language itself, the instrument, of course, for all the other slantings—the figures of speech, sign and symbol, metaphor and image, both visual and auditory. Like Emily Dickinson, the Mormon writer dwells in possibility given, like E. A. Robinson's Rembrandt, if craftsman enough, "a tool too keen for timid safety."<sup>21</sup>

Language as wit, for instance, runs rampant in Dennis Clark's "Answer to Prayer," ringing all the



changes on the Federal Archives and Records Center where Ev, as beset by concupiscence as he is by punning, is part of "the work farce," the pun and idea of farce pervading the story.<sup>22</sup> A chief delight in Neal Chandler's ironically titled *Benediction*<sup>23</sup> is the way he puts a new spin on clichés of Mormon thought and diction, working them into startling secular contexts, now comic, now sinister, that give familiar words and phrases new currency. Thus we get "the spiritually attuned public relations and marketing specialist" in a corporation merchandising "free-market Christianity," and we get "a sort of spiritual wellness spot check" in a teenager's interview with his bishop; we get "doctrinal punch" at Mormon socials, a smug Sunday School teacher sounding "like Dan Rather in the last days," a student "pure and unspotted from math," an executive's "zippered leather scripture case . . . so immense, so oiled and polished to so deep an Abyssinian hue, it seemed worthy of the golden plates themselves." In Chandler's creative combinations and applications a pyramid scheme with a strong resemblance to Amway becomes "God's own plan . . . the only divinely authorized plan for financial success in this life or the next." And everyone, of course, is familiar with what Elouise Bell can do with zucchini.<sup>24</sup>

Chandler's *Benediction* is an example of telling it slant, in this instance the slant of satire, with the consummate craft I find the rule rather than the exception today. Its humor is irreverent but affectionate, not disdainful, even when most devastating. Hypocrisy, cant, venality, "general authority," smugness and bigotry among the powerful are easy targets for the aroused satirist. More difficult objects are the tender-minded faithful unaware of their own vulnerability, who would be perplexed at being made fun of and whom the satirist needs to handle with care. In some stories there is no laughter, only wonder and compassion, when a character is in travail, frustrated, disappointed, faced with loss, experiencing pain. Then there is no satiric penetration of the crust of Mormon dogma or tickling of the soft underbelly of Mormon sentimentalism. Only pathos. Such stories are not faith-promoting so much as life-enhancing.

Humor with a bite is no stranger to contemporary Mormon literature. Bert Wilson and Dick Cracroft called our attention to "The Seriousness of Mormon Humor" and "The Humor of Mormon Seriousness" in an engaging pair of complementary articles in *Sunstone*<sup>25</sup> a good while ago. There's a motherlode of folk humor in the Mormon experience, with an especially rich vein of it among Scandinavian convert-immigrants who cope with sin and syntax in cycles of stories centering on the Word of Wisdom, polygamy, domestic troubles, natural calamities, testimony meetings, irrigation, Indians, and the Brethren, the hierarchy "vit all dat authority dey hass unter deir vest." The coin of Ephraim's humor, especially, the "town that laughs at itself," still circulates. I must limit myself to just one anecdote to illustrate how style and structure can operate at both the folk and formal levels.

When Lars Larsen is accused of stealing water and is confronted with one witness who says he was just fifty yards away when he saw Lars take the water, and another who was sixty yards away "and he seen you," Lars tells the justice, "Dey are both liars. Dey vas more dan two hunnert yards away ven I steal dat vater." "Then you did steal the water?" "Dat," says Lars, "remains for de jury."<sup>26</sup>

In the title story of Virginia Sorensen's collection *Where Nothing is Long Ago: Memories of a Mormon Childhood*, Brother Tolsen kills a neighbor caught stealing water, one of those shovel murders not uncommon in irrigation country. Brother Tolsen turns himself in to Bishop Peterson and is acquitted by a jury to whom "stealing water is stealing life itself." When, years later, Brother Tolsen dies, Virginia as narrator, a young girl at the time of the murder, thinks, "Well, another one is gone; soon there won't be a real Danish accent left in the whole valley." One other memory lingers: after the trial, the young Virginia is driving along with her family and sees Brother Tolsen out irrigating:

*Dad and Mother waved and called to him. He lifted an arm to answer, and I saw that he held a shovel in the other hand. "I wonder if he bought a new shovel," I said suddenly. For a minute, the air seemed to have gone dead about us, in the peculiar way it sometimes can, which is so puzzling to a child. Then Mother*

*turned to me angrily. "Don't you ever let me hear you say a thing like that again!" she said. "Brother Tolson is a good, kind man!" So until this very hour*

Virginia confesses, "I never have."<sup>27</sup>

We have moved from the crude humor of "Dey vas more dan two hunnert yards away ven I steal dat vater" to the unintended irony of a young girl's "I wonder if he bought a new shovel." In such literary re-creations of the Scandinavian Mormon past, the humor has undergone a sea change, to be sure, but the indigenous anecdote and the elegant reminiscence serve the same function: they are the tie that binds, the descendant learning to cope and accommodate, through irony, as once the ancestor did through humor.

Humor at its various levels and in its various guises is surely one of Mormonism's strong suits. The personal narrative, so akin to the spiritual book-keeping of Puritan autobiography, is certainly another, endemic in the conversion experience, the struggle between faith and doubt. Related to it is the personal essay, another form congenial to the Mormon experience, as in Gene England's *Dialogues with Myself* and Mary Bradford's "Personal Essay about Personal Essays."<sup>28</sup> Terry Tempest Williams has used the form to excellent advantage as she reads the natural and human landscapes in her natural history writings and in her moving personal account of "The Clan of One-Breasted Women," about the victims of the fallout of nuclear testing in Southern Utah, including all of the women in her own family who are older than she.<sup>29</sup> Clifton Jolley describes the personal essay as "the beast," because the writer who chooses it, he says, "with neither comfort nor refuge in the satisfactions of pose or form . . . must face the beast [i.e., the truth about oneself] naked and alone."<sup>30</sup> We can see the possibilities of "telling it slant" by taking an extended look at Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's confession of her struggle to reconcile faith and doubt, a struggle I find reminiscent of Anne Bradstreet's, whose "heart rose" with anxiety, you may remember, when she first glimpsed New England's bleak and wintry shore. In her essay "Lusterware," Laurel, our new Pulitzer Prize celebrity, develops an image that entirely controls it.<sup>31</sup>

Laurel's opening startled me: "I have been thinking lately," she begins,

*about an Emily Dickinson poem I first heard twenty-five years ago in an American literature class at the University of Utah. I remember feeling intrigued and somewhat troubled as the professor read the poem since he was reported to be a lapsed Mormon. "Was that how it felt to lose faith?" I thought.*

You have probably guessed that I was that professor, and I need to give you the whole of that poem to appreciate its impact on her as well as to see what she does with it:

*It dropped so low—in my Regard—  
I heard it hit the Ground—  
And go to pieces on the Stones  
At bottom of my Mind—  
Yet blamed the Fate that flung it—less  
Than I denounced Myself,  
For entertaining Plated Wares  
Upon my Silver Shelf—<sup>32</sup>*

"Since then," says Laurel,

*I have lost faith in many things, among them Olympia typewriters, New York Times book reviews, and texturized vegetable protein; and yes, like most Latter-day Saints I have had to reconsider some of my deepest religious beliefs. . . . I have always been*

she tells us, "a somewhat skeptical person [but] as I have grown older, I have become less fearful of those 'stones at the bottom of my mind.' In fact," she says, "I am convinced that a willingness to admit disbelief is often essential to spiritual growth. . . . Though a few people seem to have been blessed," she says, "with foam rubber rather than stones at the bottom of their minds (may they rest in peace), sooner or later most of us are forced to confront our shattered beliefs." She finds Emily Dickinson's "little poem" helpful. She hadn't fully grasped the image of "Plated Wares" until she learned about lusterware, "the most popular 'Plated Wares' of Emily Dickinson's time. In the late eighteenth century," Laurel informs us,

*British manufacturers developed a technique for decorating ceramic ware with a gold or platinum film. In one variety, a platinum luster was applied to the entire surface of the object to produce what contemporaries called "poor man's silver." Shiny, inexpensive, and easy to get, it was also fragile, as breakable as any piece of pottery or china. Only a gullible or very inexperienced person would mistake it for true silver.*

Now we have the necessary information for appreciating Laurel's metaphorical distinction between a genuine and a superficial belief which is central to the rest of the essay, an essay so well crafted I wish there were time to read the whole of it together. Here's an inkling of her application of the image:

*All of us have lusterware as well as silver on that shelf we keep at the top of our minds. A lusterware Joseph Smith, for instance, is unfulfillingly young, handsome, and spiritually radiant; unschooled but never superstitious, persecuted but never vengeful, human but never mistaken. A lusterware image fulfills our need for an idea without demanding a great deal from us. There are lusterware missions and marriages, lusterware friendships, lusterware histories and yes, lusterware visions of ourselves. Most of these will be tested at some point on the stones at the bottom of our minds.*

Laurel then proceeds to describe at length several painful testings of her own, including agonizing differences with her bishop. Toward the end, she gives an account of a three-day unofficial women's conference at Nauvoo which left her despairing of any hope for peace for herself or change in the Church until, unbidden, on the banks of the Mississippi, she seemed to hear that voice recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants 128 as "a voice of gladness! a voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth. . . . I am not talking here about a literal voice," she says,

*but an infusion of the Spirit, a kind of Pentecost that for a moment dissolved the boundaries between heaven and earth and between present and past. I felt as though I were re-experiencing the events the early Saints had described. I am not a mystical person. In ordinary decisions in my family I am far more*

*likely to call for a vote than a prayer, and when other people proclaim their "spiritual experiences" I am generally cautious. But I would gladly sift through a great trough of meal for even a little bit of that leaven.*

In her conclusion, Laurel gives her central image a cautionary turn: "The temptations of skepticism are real," she says.

*Sweeping up the lusterware, we sometimes forget to polish and cherish the silver, not knowing that the power of discernment is one of the gifts of the Spirit, that the ability to discover counterfeit wares also gives us the power to recognize the genuine.*

There's not a superfluous word nor a misplaced sentence in the whole of the essay and no straining of the metaphor. A firm sentiment and sure sense of self, its vulnerabilities as well as its strengths, clothe the essay's moral armature. The figure breathes and walks.

I have dwelt at length on Laurel's essay to make her experience palpable, a crisis of belief in aesthetic terms not unlike the poetry of crisis and conversion in Jonathan Edwards's *Personal Narrative*. Have we here an example of "faithful literature," counterpart to Richard Bushman's "faithful history"? (I'll have to tell Laurel when she comes here in February to talk to the Humanities Center and to the Friends of the Library at the U that a former student once sent me a card which read simply, "You changed my life." I can only hope she—and Laurel—meant for the better.)

A bare patch in the Mormon literary landscape, it seems to me, is the meditation. I don't mean the word as loosely applied to a meditation on whatever, a way of accommodating informal thoughts on love, or time, or faith, or friendship, and so on. I mean in a sense closer to Thomas Hooker's seventeenth-century definition: "Meditation is a serious intention of the mind whereby we come to search out the truth, and settle it effectually upon the heart."<sup>33</sup> Such meditation is a strenuous intellectual discipline, not mere daydreaming. As a boy I remember a copy of Orson F. Whitney's *Saturday Night Thoughts* in the built-in china cupboard that served as our bookcase. It was, I realized later, a

Mormon version of that Puritan "preparation of the heart" that had to precede communion. Here may be Mormonism's entry into that world of contemplation marked by great devotional literature, a mood and mode that gets crowded out in our almost obsessive and unreflective religious activism.

The lapse here may be linked to the lack of style and structure in Mormon sermons, at every level—ward, stake, general conference. I would not want artifice to supplant sincerity, nor sophistication to displace substance; but in the sermon, if it is to become part of Mormon literary inheritance as it was in the days of Brigham Young's discourses, once more the way a thing is said is ultimately what is said. The meetinghouse, with its plain style heritage may not be the place for eloquence (I do not undervalue the apprenticeship of the two-and-a-half-minute talk or the spontaneity of the missionary farewell or the extemporaneous remarks at sacrament meeting), but is there hope for the Tabernacle with its ghostly echoing of the rude but resonant eloquence of the discourses of the pioneer generation and the structured and not unpolished addresses during those interludes when a Widtsoe, a Talmage, a B. H. Roberts or a Hugh B. Brown took the pulpit? The temple service, with its prescribed liturgy, is now enhanced, I am told, by multi-media presentations but still without the elevated sacramental poetry one imagines better suited to the ceremony. In Mormon services, I'm afraid, as far as the Word is concerned, the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.

We may not have a very literary liturgy but we do have, inherent in doctrine and evolving in practice, a literary aesthetic and a growing body of discerning literary criticism crucial to the continuing health of the literature itself. James Russell Lowell in his day cautioned overzealous literary nationalists that a national literature needed more than patriotism—it required critical standards. Just so Mormon literature needs more than piety. The defense of the faith and the Saints for several generations took the form of that "Home Literature" we have already mentioned, predictably didactic. Stephen L. Tanner urges us, in "The Moral Mea-

sure of Literature," to "stop fretting over the legitimacy of moral criticism and get on with the business of learning to do it well."<sup>34</sup> Mormon literary criticism, knowingly or not, seems to agree with Irving Howe, as I do, that "literary criticism, like literature itself, can be autonomous but hardly self-sufficient. . . . A work of literature," he insists, "acquires its interest for us through a relationship, admittedly subtle, difficult and indirect, to the whole of human experience."<sup>35</sup>

The critical reviews and essays in *BYU Studies*, *Literature and Belief*, *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, *Exponent II*, and such secular allies as *Quarterly West*, *Weber Studies*, *Western American Literature* and the prefaces and introductions to the collections I have already mentioned, together with the critical papers delivered at AML meetings, have created an educated symbiotic relationship between writer and reader, mutually supportive and nourishing. There was nothing like it in the Church in my growing up. Our literary window was one-way, perversely not enabling us to look out. Today that window lets in light and air from the larger world of letters against which we can measure our own.

We are ready, it seems to me, for an anthology of distinctly Mormon literary criticism, counterpart to the collections of Mormon historiography our colleagues in history have already produced such as Bitton and Beecher's *New Views of Mormon History*, Bitton and Arrington's *Mormons and Their Historians*, and, forthcoming, Michael Quinn's *The New Mormon History* and George D. Smith's *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*.<sup>36</sup> I propose a critical anthology as an AML project. Borrowing from Eliot, we could call it *Tradition and the Individual Talent: Essays in Mormon Literary Criticism*. Its contents are now simply scattered among the periodicals I have mentioned, waiting to be collected.<sup>37</sup>

Plato's doctrine of the soul<sup>38</sup> or Sterling McMurrin's *Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965) should probably preface the volume as an introduction to Mormon aesthetics. If souls have a preexistence, then artist and audience have a slum-

bering memory of the good, the true, and the beautiful, requiring only to be awakened, with works of literature and art (including the performing arts) the means of that awakening. Art indeed is less cognition than recognition. We have a "double witness," says Robert Rees, "when our awareness of things either terrestrial or celestial is quickened by the esthetic as well as by the spiritual imagination."<sup>39</sup> Given this concept, the creative process is more discovery or disclosure than invention, and when the artist feels the work is "right," he will, says Merrill Bradshaw, have a sense of a "celestial kiss,"<sup>40</sup> which I take to be a sensory experience of artistic grace, not unlike Jonathan Edwards's "sense of the heart," palpable, to use Edwards's own figure, as the taste of honey on the tongue. In critical discourse we may be a bit embarrassed to apply the "celestial kiss" test, but the creative process is as mysterious as Joseph Smith's practice of burying his face in a hat to read a luminous stone. Empirically rather than Platonically speaking, of course, the Mormon writer is no more privy to God's purposes than scientist, theologian, or philosopher, though, like them, he or she is free to speculate about the mysteries; but they fall flat when they attempt to affirm the truth or falsity of the great nonempirical, which is to say metaphysical, questions like preexistence and immortality in preachments rather than through the spiritual struggles of the characters who people their stories, plays, and poetry.

If Plato or McMurrin provides the prologue to our anthology, Bruce Jorgensen should provide the epilogue with his enumeration of topics in our latest *AML Newsletter*<sup>41</sup> for future sessions to explore, a critical blueprint comprehensive enough to program us through the '90s.

I believe with Santayana that "the chastity of the mind should not be yielded easily nor to the first comer."<sup>42</sup> Although I find myself badly out of step with institutional Mormonism, often distressed to the point of anger with the conduct of the corporate church, I feel myself in tune with the Mormon experience, by which I mean the sum of Mormon history and culture as lay members have lived it and lay writers have striven to describe, critique,

and celebrate it. I am drawn less to the sacred texts of Mormon theology handed down from on high than to the subtexts of writers who wring their truths from their daily pacing beneath the checkered canopy of Mormon belief, writers who exemplify what Robert Frost once described as "the will braving alien entanglements."<sup>43</sup> I relate to those writers who, experiencing all those tensions Levi Peterson names in his preface to *Greening Wheat* and entertaining all those aspirations Gene England holds out in his panoramic "Dawning of a Brighter Day," cry out, in voices as unique as their individual talents, cry out with that father recorded in St. Mark who sought a cure for a son racked by fits, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!"

Whatever my leaning toward Lucretius and his *Of the Nature of Things* as opposed to Christian and hence Mormon cosmology, I have one sure conviction about the kind of literature we've been talking about this evening: like Chandler's precocious teenager Emmett, looking straight into the eyes of authority in his interview with the bishop and saying he thought he would like to be a writer, this literature, as Chandler says of Emmett, "is really on to something."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>William Mulder is emeritus professor of English at the University of Utah, where he taught for forty-one years, edited the *Western Humanities Review*, established both the American Studies Institute and the Center for Intercultural Studies, and, on various leaves, developed the American Studies Research Center in Hyderabad, India. His Harvard dissertation was published as *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957). With A. R. Mortensen he edited *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York, Knopf, 1958). AML honored him with a life membership in 1992. This paper was first read for a gathering of the Association for Mormon Letters at the home of Ann Edwards Cannon, Salt Lake City, 20 September 1991.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph Walder Emerson, "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England," *The Portable Emerson*, edited by Mark Van Doren (New York: Viking, 1946), 523-24.

<sup>3</sup>A Nauvoo Library and Institute was founded in 1844.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Kim, *My Hard Bargain* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 34.

<sup>5</sup>William A. Wilson, "In Praise of Ourselves: Stories to Tell," *BTU Studies* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1990).

<sup>6</sup>Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, eds., *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1974); Levi S. Peterson, ed., *Greening Wheat: Fifteen Mormon Short Stories* (Midvale, Utah: Orion Books, 1983); Eugene England and Dennis Clark, eds., *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989).

<sup>7</sup>(1949; reprint ed., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963).

<sup>8</sup>An abridged version appears in *BYU Studies* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1982); the full text is in Thomas G. Alexander and Jessie L. Embry, eds., *After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Sesquicentennial Perspective* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books for the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1983), 95-135.

<sup>9</sup>It first appeared in *The Christian Examiner*, January 1830, as "The Importance and Means of a National Literature" and was reprinted in Robert Spiller and Harold Blodgett, eds., *The Roots of National Culture: To 1830* (New York: Macmillan, 1949).

<sup>10</sup>Bruce Jorgensen, for example, in "Digging the Foundation: Making and Reading Mormon Literature," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 9 (Winter 1974).

<sup>11</sup>Karl Keller, "On Words and the Word of God: The Delusions of a Mormon Literature," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1969), 14.

<sup>12</sup>In *A Believing People*, 208-11.

<sup>13</sup>Edward A. Geary, "Mormondom's Lost Generation: The Novelists of the 1940s," *BYU Studies* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1977).

<sup>14</sup>Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," in *Essays in Modern Literary Criticism*, edited by Ray B. Best, Jr., 189-205 (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1952).

<sup>15</sup>Keller, "On Words," 17.

<sup>16</sup>Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, n.d.), 29.

<sup>17</sup>Emily Dickinson, Poem #1129, in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 792.

<sup>18</sup>*The Whole Booke of Psalmes* (Cambridge, 1640, reprinted in facsimile as *The Bay Psalm Book* (Cambridge: Artemis, 1973).

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in my essay, "Style and the Man: Thomas Adams, Prose Shakespeare of Puritan Divines," *Harvard Theological Review* 48, no. 2 (April 1955): 136-37.

<sup>20</sup>*Manuductio ad Ministerium*, extracted in Milton R. Stern and Seymour L. Gross, eds., *American Literature: Colonial and Federal to 1800* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 129, 134.

<sup>21</sup>E. A. Robinson, "Rembrandt to Rembrandt," in *Collected Poems* (New York: MacMillan, 1954), 590.

<sup>22</sup>In Peterson, *Greening Wheat*, 151-76.

<sup>23</sup>*Benediction: A Book of Stories* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989).

<sup>24</sup>"Zzzzzuchini," in her collection *Only When I Laugh* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 1-3.

<sup>25</sup>*Sunstone* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1985).

<sup>26</sup>See my essay, "A Sense of Humus: Scandinavian Mormon Immigrant Humor," Juanita Brooks Lecture in American History and Culture, Dixie College, St. George, Utah, 1985; and Lucille Johnson Butler, "Ephraim's Humor" (M.A. thesis, University of Utah, 1950).

<sup>27</sup>Virginia Sorensen, *Where Nothing Is Long Ago* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), 3-14.

<sup>28</sup>Eugene England, *Dialogues with Myself: Personal Essays on Mormon Experience* (Midvale, Utah: Orion Books, 1984); and Mary Lythgoe Bradford, "I, Eye, Aye: A personal Essay on Personal Essays," *Dialogue* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1978), 81ff.

<sup>29</sup>*Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

<sup>30</sup>"Mormons and the Beast: In Defense of the Personal Essay," *Dialogue* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 137.

<sup>31</sup>The essay appeared originally in *Exponent II* and has been collected since in Philip Barlow, *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars* (Centerville, Utah: Canon Press, 1986), a volume dedicated to Lowell Bennion. Quotations that follow are taken from pp. 195-203.

<sup>32</sup>Poem \$747, in Johnson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 569.

<sup>33</sup>*The Application of Redemption* (1659), excerpted in Russel B. Nye and Norman S. Grabo, eds., *American Thought and Writing: Volume 1: The Colonial Period* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 108.

<sup>34</sup>*BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 284.

<sup>35</sup>From the Preface to *A World More Attractive* (Freeport, 1970), x.

<sup>36</sup>Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, eds., *New Views of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987); Davis Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988); D. Michael Quinn, ed., *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Salt Lake City: Signature books, 1992); and George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

<sup>37</sup>Lavina Fielding Anderson and Eugene England are preparing a volume of collected essays on Mormon literary criticism for Signature Books.

<sup>38</sup>See Phaedo and portions of *The Symposium*.

<sup>39</sup>"The Imagination's New Beginnings: Thoughts on Es-thetics and Religion," *Dialogue* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1969): 25.

<sup>40</sup>"Toward a Mormon Aesthetic," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 95.

<sup>41</sup>"Call for Papers for 1992 AML Symposium," *AML Newsletter*, 15, no. 2 (June 1991).

<sup>42</sup>Quoted from memory.

<sup>43</sup>"The Constant Symbol," introductory essay to *The Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Modern Library, 1946), xvii.

# Towards a Mormon Criticism: Should We Ask "Is This Mormon Literature?"

Gideon O. Burton<sup>1</sup>

CONSIDER THE RESTORATION of the Gospel as a paradigm for Mormon criticism. Sensing some apostasy from truth, the critic rectifies this falling away through an act of restoration. As Joseph Smith sensed something incomplete about the truths of religion and then became an instrument in restoring this truth, so the Mormon critic, equally sensitive, becomes an instrument in restoring the truth of which he is witness. One *feels* a void, then *fills* that void with words. Here Restoration invokes original Creation: God's spirit, brooding on the void, filled it through his Word. In this sense Mormon criticism is both restorative and creative, both reactive and active. The Restoration paradigm provides powerful metaphors for criticism: critics can assume roles as prophets and creators, as mediators and seers. It is a heady vision for criticism, but one to which I have been witness, one for which—according to the paradigm—I am constrained to bear testimony.

Richard Cracroft exemplified Mormon criticism in his review of *Harvest*, the recent anthology of Mormon poetry. The apostasy Cracroft identified was the non-Mormon nature of many of the poems included in a putatively Mormon volume. He sensed this regrettable falling away from Mormon spiritual roots in such poems as Lance Larsen's "Passing the Sacrament at Eastgate Nursing Home." Here he discerned "no hint of transcendence or greening spirituality," calling it "a competent, earth-bound (non-Mormon) poem."<sup>2</sup> Cracroft delineated the criteria for Mormon literature which he felt would restore it to its true potential. Truly Mormon literature would resound with the "distinctively Latter-day Saint voice, the sensibility of the believing poet." He spoke of the stewardship of the Latter-day Saint artist centering in a

*deep-felt awareness of mankind's indebtedness to the redemption freely proffered by Christ and of the power God has granted his children to sanctify themselves by overcoming the world. In such a reality Latter-day Saints live, move, and have their being; it is their meat and drink; and it is this covenant theology that has moved Saints, from 1830 to the present, to flee Babylon, sacrifice the world, and cross the spiritual plains to Zion, forging en route an evolving latter-day mythos that becomes the soil—not merely a sprayed-on nutrient—for the Latter-day Saint poet.<sup>3</sup>*

As Joseph felt a falling away from truth and then helped fill it with a stream of potent words, so Richard Cracroft has felt a falling away from truth in Mormon letters and has filled the void with his characteristic eloquence.

Bruce Jorgensen, in his turn, also fulfilled the paradigm of Mormon criticism when he addressed a falling away from the truth, a certain apostasy he sensed in Cracroft's review. Like Cracroft and Joseph Smith before him, Jorgensen, in his 1991 presidential address to this body, filled the void he felt by trying to restore the truth to which he has been witness.

Cracroft's review, bold enough to label a poem by a Mormon author about a Mormon priesthood ordinance as fundamentally non-Mormon, raised a question that's been raised before, What is Mormon literature? But determining the essence of Mormon literature is precisely that falling away from truth to which Jorgensen objected. Labeling works as "Mormon" or "non-Mormon" is an act of uncharitable exclusion. Jorgensen proposed a kinder, gentler criticism, one employing the "ancient and widely understood habit of hospitality as metaphor

and ground for Christian (and Mormon) imagination and criticism.<sup>74</sup> In Jorgensen's vision for criticism he would restore this ancient custom of hospitality; we would then see ourselves as "a wayside inn, not a court." Rather than making essentialist judgments tending towards xenophobia and ethnocentrism we should be entertaining guests, hearing new tales. Our criticism, if I am accurately representing Jorgensen, should convey a sense of tolerant community that acknowledges differences in experience and invites these to be starting points for sharing our stories, rather than demarcations of inclusion and exclusion. "Welcome to our common room," should be our invitation to the stranger. "Tell us your story."

Interestingly, in criticizing Cracroft's review, Jorgensen was holding fast to Cracroft's criteria. Jorgensen's criticism was deeply rooted in the Mormon experience and spiritual tradition: not only did he draw upon scriptural evidence from Abraham through the road to Emmaus episode on the issue of hosting strangers, but his tone was characteristic of those key Mormon communication ideals articulated in the Doctrine and Covenants: he spoke with persuasion, with kindness, with gentleness and love unfeigned.

Cracroft may question whether Jorgensen spoke with "pure knowledge" since he believes their positions to be conflicting. I am confident that if he feels a lack, he will fill it in his turn, making another attempt to restore the truth to which he has been witness. This is consistent with the Restoration paradigm. Truth was not restored wholesale to the earth one spring day in 1820 like the ark of the covenant returning to Solomon's temple. Successive prophets and visions have built up truth line upon line, sometimes pronouncing things seemingly in conflict with one another but always in a consistent spirit. And so if Jorgensen and Cracroft disagree, even strongly, they both serve truth by speaking it in love; and in their cheerful banter towards one another, we sense a mutual love unfeigned. That crucial tone of goodwill, a contrast from the rancor that characterizes some non-Mormon criticism, is an act of charity towards their audiences, allowing us faith in the reconciliation of views that may at first appear opposing.

To me the conflict between Jorgensen and Cracroft is resolved at one remove, at the point at which we see them both practicing Mormon criticism. Mormon criticism is what I thought my paper would center on since I believe this to be the issue that frames (and therefore should take priority over) the issue of what constitutes Mormon literature. I do believe criticism undergirds the issue of defining our literature and hope to keep this as a primary focal point, but there are larger things afoot. If we will view both literature and criticism within the larger context of the Restoration, then the two positions which Cracroft and Jorgensen represent—fidelity to the Mormon mythos and openness to otherness—become complementary and mutually interdependent necessities in a venture so significant it cuts across lines of Mormon membership: the building of culture.

As Cracroft exemplifies in his passionate eloquence, the sense of a unique vision is empowering. Unless we safeguard our sense of being a peculiar people with noble and lofty purposes, Mormon letters can never achieve its potential significance for Mormon and non-Mormon audiences alike. Inscribed upon the palms of our hands and the fleshy tables of our hearts should be those seminal statements from Spencer W. Kimball and Orson Whitney, the veritable patriarchal blessings for Mormon letters:

*For years I have been waiting for someone to do justice in recording in song and story and painting and sculpture the story of the Restoration, the reestablishment of the kingdom of God on earth . . .<sup>5</sup>*

*We will yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own. God's ammunition is not exhausted. His brightest spirits are held in reserve for the latter times. In God's name and by his help we will build up a literature whose top shall touch heaven, though its foundations may now be low in [the] earth.<sup>6</sup>*

If we do not regularly revive and refresh the vision in these words, we may be left wandering in Sinai or on some muddy bank of the Platte, forever this side of the promised land where Mormon letters blossom as a rose. Moreover, unless we sustain this vision, a non-Mormon audience will suffer from



what we do not contribute to it both by way of literature and criticism. So concerned about the development of our own culture, we sometimes forget that its greatness will in no way be proportional to its insularity. Having Miltons and Shakespeares of our own means providing new Miltons and Shakespeares for the entire world. After all, it wouldn't be Mormon to horde up truth and beauty for self-consumption like a two-year cache of unground wheat. In keeping the vision of Mormon letters alive we must keep alive its complete breadth.

That breadth must comprise the unique role possible for Mormon criticism, not just Mormon literature. Mormon criticism begins in the fact that Mormonism itself is a critique of the world it has entered, and its set of claims about God and man and time and eternity provide the basis for a rich critical tradition as Eugene England has eloquently and powerfully argued in his seminal sesquicentennial essay on Mormon literature.<sup>7</sup>

Early leaders of the Church made specific statements regarding the nature of critical discourse and its relationship to learning and literature of which we should be reminded. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young both encouraged vigorous verbal explorations of truth. From Liberty Jail Joseph mourned,

*How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations—too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God.*

Hugh Nibley clarifies Joseph's meaning of *condescending*: "settling for inferior goods to avoid effort and tension." Such intellectual cowardice Brother Brigham could not abide. With typical verve he affirmed:

*That diffidence or timidity we must dispense with. When it becomes our duty to talk, we ought to be willing to talk. . . . Interchanging our ideas and exhibiting that which we believe and understand affords an opportunity for detecting and correcting errors.*

In Nibley's gloss of Brigham, "the expanding mind must be openly and frankly critical, come hell or High Council."<sup>8</sup>

Rigorous critical discourse was seen as a necessary part of what Nibley explains is the grandiose intellectual project to which newly converted Saints have been put to work, "nothing less than the salvaging of world civilization!"<sup>9</sup> We can hear this in the less quoted but equally important parts of Orson Whitney's 1888 "Home Literature" address. "God had designed, and his Prophet [Joseph Smith] had foreseen, a great and glorious future for that people," he said.

*He knew there must come a time . . . when Zion, no longer the foot, but as the head, the glorious front of the world's civilization, would arise and shine "the joy of the whole earth"—the seat of learning, the source of wisdom, and the centre of political power, when, side by side with pure Religion, would flourish Art and Science, her fair daughters.*

Zion's citizens, Whitney foresaw, would be "as famed for intelligence and culture as for purity, truth and beauty." "[Joseph Smith] knew that his people must progress, that their destiny demanded it; that culture is the duty of man, as intelligence is the glory of God." Whitney's rousing rhetoric impressed on young saints that they were "on the threshold of the mightiest mission ever given to men in the flesh," a mission, I would emphasize, entailing more than acquiring converts (however important that is). The Restoration comprises the very renaissance of the world and its culture. And, to continue citing Whitney, "It is by means of literature that much of this great work will have to be accomplished; a literature of power and purity, worthy of such a work." Did Whitney see literature as proselyting fare? Yes. But not only! "Literature means learning" he asserted, giving it an important epistemological—not just a proselyting—purpose.<sup>10</sup> To read Whitney is to understand literature as more of an activity than a body of static works. It is what we do on the way to a still distant, spiritual-cultural destiny called Zion. The reading and writing of lit-

erature become enterprises that are part of the renovation of world culture enabled by the Restoration as it continues unfolding towards Zion.

Our early leaders did not divorce the concept of literature from that of achieving Zion, and this meant not shortchanging literature's potential to help Saints both teach *and* learn. The urgency in Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's opinions about rigorous critical discourse came from their understanding of how much the Saints needed to grow intellectually, as well as from an understanding of the natural error many Latter-day Saints still make: believing we already *have* all truth because we would claim it. These Church leaders saw the reading and producing of literature as a tool to help Saints grow to the level of intellectual vitality a Zion society required and to approach the full breadth of truth that a Zion world would embrace. They held to this view of literature's role as strongly as they held that it also served to record or disseminate Mormon wisdom to the literate and the literary. "Let us not narrow ourselves up," Brigham warned,

*for the world, with all its variety of useful information and its rich hoard of hidden treasure, is before us; and eternity, with all its sparkling intelligence, lofty aspirations, and unspeakable glories, is before us.<sup>11</sup>*

Mormonism aspires to intelligence and culture as ideals towards which we may move only by engaging ourselves in heaven and earth at once in an act of critical faith. Literature is a way of broadcasting our knowledge and experience, but may more fruitfully be seen in light of Brigham Young's and Orson Whitney's comments as learning, as epistemology, as an agency through which this Zion culture to which we aspire is, in the same act, discovered and achieved.

Given the views of these early Church leaders on literature, critical discourse and education in light of the unfolding Restoration and its movement towards a Zion culture, I am better prepared to show how Cracroft's and Jorgensen's seemingly disparate views actually frame the twin requirements for a Mormon criticism and literature. Cracroft urges

us to be grounded in the Mormon mythos in both our criticism and our literature. He is right, for if our roots are not deep in the soil of Mormon experience and the spiritual reality of the Restoration, we are only voices in the relativistic maelstrom of modern Babel and Babylon. But to be grounded thus is to be willing to journey into the unknown with faith that in entertaining the stranger, as Jorgensen urges us to do, we might be entertaining angels unawares, messengers of truth who require our patient listening before we know them for who they are.

The production and analysis of literature is insufficiently narrow if these activities are viewed only as means of disseminating or shoring up what we already have or know. Our early Church leaders urged us to deeper kinds of engagement, the kind of interaction with different thoughts and people that will enable us to grow and change, not simply dispense or teach. In entertaining the stranger we might teach, but we should hope to learn and to develop through exchanges made in good faith. Our Mormon religion, our heritage and theology and experience are all precious and worthy to be shared; they are equally worthy to be expanded, to be completed, to be broadened in that adventure that can only come through entertaining what is strange to us and by maintaining that humility inherent in the Restoration from its inception: truth comes in installments of light, and sometimes only in the friendly fray of intense critical discourse.

Worries over preserving Mormon identity in literature should center less on whether we are reminding readers of our current cultural configuration than on whether we are maintaining this vision of an emerging Mormon identity—one in which we come to understand ourselves more fully during that process of reflection and interaction which occurs in making ourselves known to others and making others known to us. We will see ourselves emerging not just in numbers, but in cultural significance—both to the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to those outside our fold.

But just as our Mormon roots enjoin openness to the stranger, that same religious heritage constrains the nature of that openness. "Entertaining the stranger" does not equate to "pluralism" or "diversity"; acknowledging and seeking truth in all realms isn't tantamount to relativism. One is open in a Mormon way only in terms of the Restoration: we are to seek wisdom from out of the best books, but faith is to accompany our studies; we are to be instructed in things both in heaven and earth (D&C 88:78-80), but are required to prove and test all things before holding fast to them as truth; we seek after what is of good report (within and outside of Mormon areas), but we are to use our powers of discernment to gauge whether the report is trustworthy.

A Mormon epistemology governs our openness: knowledge is sought, debated, and expressed by those believing truth can be circumscribed into one great whole; the Holy Ghost is held to be as valid a means of knowledge as empiricism or rational debate; whatever persuades to believe in Christ is held to be of God; individuals are empowered to discern absolutely what is of God in their own lives but are constrained by concepts of stewardship and nonlateral revelation not to generalize such insights freely to others; the means by which we obtain, discuss, and spread knowledge is understood to have an ethical dimension that we ignore only at the risk of violating our covenants of allegiance and our deepest convictions to be charitable and honor the worth of souls.<sup>12</sup>

Should we ask whether something is Mormon literature? Not unless we are prepared to engage the issue fully, something that cannot be done without recourse to the larger issues this question invokes, including both the openness enjoined by Jorgensen and the rootedness in Mormon experience and vision called for by Cracroft. Hopefully I have shown these two positions to be inter-implicating: one cannot be true to the Mormon mythos without venturing out, pioneer-like, to engage strange worlds and peoples; similarly, our encounters with strangers are prosperous only through the liberating restraints of our Mormon epistemology.

Of even greater importance than the reconciliation of these two views is that which envelopes them both—the Restoration. Mormon literature, as Mormon criticism, history, education, arts, and discourse generally, must be regarded within the encompassing vision and teleology of the Restoration. To what is all of this leading, after all? Mormon literature and criticism can progress only within a vision of the rise of Mormon culture to its culmination in a Zion culture. Another way of saying this is that the role of Mormon literature and criticism will not be to establish what our culture currently conceives of as Zion (which I fear is considered too apocalyptically distant and too narrowly as something like a cross between the United Order and the Emerald City); rather, Mormon criticism and literature will help to discover and define Zion—to *achieve* this aspiration, not just reflect it. Mormon literature and criticism cannot work towards these ends so long as they are seen statically. Their available potential is linked to their heuristic and explorative capacities, not just their ability to mimetically represent or advertise Mormon experience or religion.

What is Mormon literature? The answer will always change so long as it is a literature living up to its potential for furthering the Restoration. Like those who would read and write it, Mormon literature must be seen as progressing towards our common goal. Perhaps it, like us, can fall away, repent, and move forward to Zion.

Perhaps we have fallen away from the unity of our founders' visions and must be restored to the ideal that our literary enterprise is an effort to salvage, perfect, and redeem world culture. It is a vision with heights so high one gasps at the pitch, but then, great doings are only fueled by great visions and we are believers in the small and simple bringing great things to pass.

Let us view Mormon letters and criticism as means of engaging the world and the restored gospel simultaneously. This puts us into a precious and precarious position of participating simultaneously in two worlds which are never wholly compatible. There is always the danger of closing one-

self to the other side. More frequent, I believe, are two dangers: misrepresenting one side to another and underestimating the utility of one side to the other. Let me illustrate.

As Mormons we fall prey to a certain fallacy of gleaning. Told to search the world for knowledge, we come home with reiterations of things we already knew, like LaRena Homer, the protagonist in Donald R. Marshall's "All the Cats in Zanzibar" who visits Egypt and the Holy Lands but never leaves Panguitch.<sup>13</sup> If we reduce the world's learning back into Mormon terms without allowing our engagement with the world to change or redefine our essential being, we might as well have stayed in Panguitch with LaRena. I respect John S. Tanner's essay, "Making a Mormon of Milton" which criticizes this easy trap of dissolving real otherness through assimilation.<sup>14</sup> Engaging the other is an act of faith, not an exercise in sacking a text for Mormon-looking quotes or attitudes. Our indignation rises when people misrepresent Mormons by putting us into their unsavory terms without respect to our essential identity, yet I fear Wordsworth might feel we misrepresent his essential identity in our glib and acontextual repetitions of his "trailing clouds of glory" lines.

The second error I mentioned being possible for the Mormon critic—perched precariously there between two worlds—is underestimating the utility of one group for the other. A good example of this is the dismissive impulse some Mormons have regarding works of "gentile" literature, particularly those which depict evils of which Mormons do not approve. And while I do think another tenet of Mormon criticism is the fundamental respect of a reader's agency (even the agency to bypass art works I hold dear), I admire how Karl Keller has pointed out how fiction, even putatively "bad" fiction, may serve ends that Mormons could identify as their own. He explains how the reading of literature is "a kind of sacrament of the Lord's supper in which one constantly renews his search for anything that is true and good."<sup>15</sup> He helps Mormons see that even the worst literature might be morally useful in engaging our critical search for the true and good.

More of this kind of criticism could redeem whole literary worlds for some Mormons. (To me redemption seems both an appropriate and a promising vein for Mormon critical activity).

Keller's criticism is also useful because it employs a religious ordinance analogously. Once analogized, the religious concept is made available to the secular reader who may dismiss religious faith altogether. An atheistic reader, for example, could alter her view of the fundamentally disengaged nature of aesthetics after considering Keller's analogy. Never practicing religion herself, she still could understand that Mormons or Christians generally employ the sacrament ordinance for introspection and may choose to believe this experience is genuinely analogous to the reading experience. A Mormon critic knows you don't have to make someone a Mormon to bring him or her good thoughts and things by way of our religion.

Had I time to expand I would further probe the ways by which the religious and secular realms can be resources to one another and how fruitful could be our role as Mormon critics in exploiting this reciprocal relationship. To be brief, our middle position between two worlds enables us to consider religion in secular terms as a means to better understanding religious realities, as well as to understand secular concerns in religious terms as a means to better understanding those things. Kenneth Burke has mined a rich vein here in his formidable *Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (1961, reprint ed., Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1970). He is a model to Mormon critics in exploiting religious language for the secular realm. He does this not out of any missionary zeal, but because he finds religious language such a thorough system and thus a powerful critical paradigm when applied analogously to other fields. Wouldn't it be uncharitable not to give others our own thorough theology in this same way? We would do well to imitate Burke.

I myself have found Mormonism to be an effective critical paradigm in secular settings. At a recent conference at UCLA I delivered a paper on the Book of Mormon. No one there shouted foul. Many

non-Mormons found the Book of Mormon directly relevant to their professional lives as literary scholars<sup>16</sup> as I explained how this book, self-conscious of its own position vis-à-vis an authoritative canon, exemplified issues of how a given canon can legitimately expand.

There are obviously more issues here than time. Mormon criticism must be addressed at more length. The fact that criticism has power to legitimate and give shape to a field of literature gives us, a group assembled to promote Mormon literature, special warrant to continue investigating the nature of Mormon criticism. I hope that my remarks have helped to place Mormon literature within the larger context of Mormon criticism, and both within the encompassing frame of the Restoration.

Consider the Restoration, not merely as a pattern or paradigm for Mormon criticism, but as a vision within whose contemplation Mormon criticism, literature, and culture will flourish. Let us restore the vision of the Restoration itself, the critical methods which our Church fathers enjoined as a means of advancing it, the cultural renaissance it holds out as an ideal, the engagement with worlds beyond familiar Mormon ones that the Restoration requires; and ultimately, the Restoration's consummation in that apex of social, political, religious, and artistic progress we call Zion.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Gideon O. Burton delivered this paper at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 25 January 1989 at Westminster College of Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup>Richard H. Cracroft, Review of *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems*, edited by Eugene England and Dennis Clark, *BYU Studies* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 123.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 122, 121.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce W. Jorgensen, "To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say," *Annual: Papers of the Association for Mormon Letters* (Salt Lake City: Association for Mormon Letters, 1992).

<sup>5</sup>As quoted in Steven P. Sondrup, editor, *Arts and Inspiration: Mormon Perspectives* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), xiv, and Karl Keller, "On Words and the Word of God: The Delusions of a Mormon Literature," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1969): 16.

<sup>6</sup>Orson Whitney, "Home Literature" (1888), in *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints*, edited by Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 206.

<sup>7</sup>Eugene England, "The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years," in *After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Sesquicentennial Perspective*, edited by Thomas G. Alexander and Jessie L. Embry, 97-135. Charles Redd Monographs in Western History No. 13 (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983).

<sup>8</sup>Hugh Nibley, "Educating the Saints—A Brigham Young Mosaic," in Cracroft and Lambert, *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-Day Saints*, 229-30.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>10</sup>Whitney, "Home Literature," 204-5.

<sup>11</sup>As quoted in Nibley, "Educating the Saints," 223.

<sup>12</sup>This list merely introduces a topic which deserves greater explication. The relationship between a distinctively Mormon epistemology and the nature of Mormon discourse needs a more full exploration.

<sup>13</sup>In his *The Rummage Sale* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 27-35.

<sup>14</sup>"Making a Mormon of Milton," *BYU Studies* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 191-206.

<sup>15</sup>Keller, "On Words and the Word of God," 19.

<sup>16</sup>So I would like to believe. The paper did engage heated and fruitful discussion concerning the literary canon in light of the religious one.

# "Though Like the Wanderer": Outside the Group in Mormon Short Fiction

Derk Michael Koldewyn<sup>1</sup>

*Then Jesus was led up of the Spirit, into the wilderness, to be with God. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, and had communed with God, he was afterwards an hungered, and was left to be tempted of the devil. (JST Matt. 4:1-2)*

WHILE THERE IS A WIDE DIVERSITY of subject, theme, and treatment in the rapidly expanding circle of good Mormon fiction, and especially Mormon short fiction, there is a theme, or subtheme, really, that is common to many works. Simply put, it is an attempt to answer some of the harder questions Latter-day Saints are involved in. How do we deal with, and how do we feel about, the stranger within the gate—or for that matter, the stranger without the gate? How comfortable are we in the role of saviors on Mount Zion, or lights on the hillside? I think the answers to these questions, if not found in our literature, are at least broached there, in one of the few places outside our hearts where we discuss them openly.

My title, "Though Like the Wanderer," has much to do with this subtheme, or at least my apprehension of it. Our Mormon heritage and our mythological foundations are based on our identification with the stranger, with the Other. Virtually anywhere you look you'll find evidence that the Mormons treasure mobility more than almost anything. (Of course, we value upward mobility most of all.) We tend, especially, to cast our history in terms of scriptural parallels, most often parallels that reflect a wandering theme. Our favorite scriptural tales become also our favorite history. The movement west is retold as the Exodus; Brigham Young is the successful Moses, at last able to enter and preside in the Promised Land. The Promised Land itself is a physical retelling of Israel, with a conveniently dead inland sea. The Book of Mor-

mon story of the rebellious sons of Mosiah who change their tune, leave their families, and work miracles of conversion in the land of the savages is retold continuously in our contemporary missionary program. Our most valuable religious ceremonies deal with the "how" and "why" of our being strangers in a strange land: how we entered the land and why we are strangers. All these stories, and countless others, try, I think, to explain our unusual penchant for wandering, our inner need to get away from the world in order to transcend it.

That need, our mandate to be participants in but not purveyors of the world, is what fuels this subtheme and its prominent character types. The more aloof we get, the more we identify with and typify the wanderer. Put more simply, the farther from the comfortable confines of the group we get, the more lost we seem. In contemporary Mormon fiction, the wanderer shows up in different but typical guises.

There are two fundamental types of wanderers, two ways of looking at the same individual or character, that determine our relationship to the wanderer. To borrow two figures from early Mormon folklore, the wanderer can either be Cain, doomed to wander aimlessly, looking for retribution, or one of the Three Nephites, who chose to wander but, we assume, with some sort of goal or guidance. That is, the stranger in a strange land can either be a lost outcast or a pioneer working toward a goal, depending mostly on our identification with him or her. Our identification is, after all, what makes the character a stranger or a friend.

Some evidence is, I think, in order. Those characters perhaps less obvious as wanderers are the ones on the brink—characters with one foot out of the

group or recent dropouts. It is essential to point out here that by "group" I mean any community, not just the Mormon Church. A group could be anything from a friendship to a city. It is only when you differentiate yourself from the group that you become a wanderer.

In Michael Fillerup's short story "Family Plantation Day," we see a character who is forced, both by his own perceptions and the group's, outside the circle. The main focus of the story is Floyd Fairbanks, the "rock, the pillar, the foundation of steel and concrete" of his ward.<sup>2</sup> He is an ideal, the prototypic modern Mormon man, with only one exception: he and his wife are incapable of having children. While everything else is perfect, up to and beyond any Mormon social expectation, one of the fundamental expectations has been nullified.

While Fillerup could have seen this as ample material for satire, he sees it as, I think rightly, a breakdown of the group. Floyd Fairbanks is the ideal modern Mormon man, not just because he is affluent, successful in the outer world, but because he is successful in the Mormon group. The narrator, a portrait of the actual Mormon man, tells us that Floyd is first to sign up for every assignment and the first to sustain his leaders; he holds the largely unwanted position of elders' quorum secretary—the list goes on almost *ad nauseam*.

However, Floyd is a wanderer precisely because he has differentiated himself from the group. Fillerup's narrator, while unable to tell us Floyd's thoughts, does a good job discerning them:

*My intentions were good when I leaned his way and whispered, "Is your wife expecting too?"*

*The tugging ceased. A smile moved across his face like a zipper. He did not look at me; his eyes were on his hands. "Nope," he said, shaking his pompadoured head. "We're one of the exceptions."*

*Gambled and lost! I tried to console him. . . . He clutched a handful of reddish hair just above the wrist and ripped it from his skin. (Fillerup, 6)*

Floyd is obviously disturbed by this problem, and it is his pained awareness that removes him from the group. In a later episode, he tries fruitlessly to stop the elders' quorum president, Bill Paxton, the

perennial family man, from turning a service project into a family day, the "Family Plantation Day" of the title. While his arguments are sound (the project would be completed faster, leaving time for individual family togetherness), they hide Floyd's reasons for wanting it an elders-only project. The presence of Floyd's absence is too much for him to bear.

The story's focus on "what happened to Floyd" is extremely important. The story begins by telling us up front that Floyd had gone somehow berserk, driving "a rented John Deere tractor across the ward garden, through the picket fence, across Brother Guillermo's weed field, through another fence, across the dirt highway, and into the irrigation canal," (Fillerup, 3) and then attempts an explanation through understated analysis of Floyd and the events beforehand.

As we progress step by step through Floyd's crisis, we see how removed Floyd has become from the normal, the status quo. That distance, at the beginning only a barely obvious mental or spiritual distance, becomes more physical as the story progresses until Floyd realizes in actual, physical terms his removal from the group. He veers away in a totally unforeseen direction and breaks through the picket fence that marks the outer bounds of the group.

Independence is the issue here, and our reading of Floyd's final state, stopped by the irrigation ditch from complete independence, depends on our own degree of attachment to the group. That is, we can either be shocked by the act, as Floyd's ward—his group—is, or we can mourn his apparent failure to escape, his fruitless attempt to go over the wall. Our reaction to Floyd betrays our own place in or out of the group.

I am not suggesting that groups are somehow bad and that independence the only true state of being. However, this story is a critique of the modern Mormon group, pointing out some of the critical gaps it does not fill. As the narrator says of Floyd and his wife, "The married childless have no special programs in the church, no satellite broadcasts, no dinners or roadshows strictly for their kind. They occupy an unacknowledged limbo." (Fillerup, 6)

All wanderers outside the group occupy some sort of personal, private limbo. To say that it is the

same space for all is to place all wanderers in a group of their own, make the wanderer a "Them" to our "Us." Limbo is much more complicated than that, as the next story, John Bennion's "Jenny, Captured by the Mormons," shows us.

Tim Behrend, reviewing this story in *Sunstone*, criticizes the narrative for "exploit[ing] the exoticism rather than the humanity of its characters and so fail[ing] to engage the reader."<sup>3</sup> It is the characters' exoticism that makes this story an ideal candidate for an exploration of wandering.

The title character, Jenny, is explicitly linked several times to the general biblical type of the wanderer. Although baptized a Mormon, Jenny still thinks "of them as the Mormons—the others."<sup>4</sup> Jenny is trapped because she is poor, and her on again/off again husband, Peter, has become a fundamentalist Mormon, a fanatic. The story follows Jenny's attempts to pool enough money to fix her car and liberate herself and her children. Like any nomad, Jenny is incredibly resourceful. Bennion takes several pages just to enumerate her varied scams and petty dishonesties. Following a young man off a bus, marking him as an easy target for a handout, Jenny becomes not the recipient of cash, but a pamphlet for the Salt Lake Baptists. The young man "thought himself a stranger in a strange land. Like me, thought Jenny" (Bennion, 122).

The relationship Jenny and Peter share exposes just how diverse wanderers can be, how wide an expanse limbo is. Even the way they met shows the diversity of method employed by different character types. Jenny crashes an Institute dance, hoping to capitalize on the free food. After she meets Peter, she anticipates that they will make love that night. However, Peter and his "house full of young men . . . repressing their sexuality until married properly in the temple," teach her the first discussion (Bennion, 129). Peter's motives are Mormon motives, motives aimed at spiritual survival, while Jenny's are earthy, intensely practical motives.

While Jenny is the principal, the explicit wanderer in this story, Peter is as much a wanderer as she. His split from the group, from his family of "stable, conservative, middle-class farmers and busi-

nessmen," people who are "staid as clay," (Bennion, 136) is as important as Jenny's perceived separation from the greater whole of the Salt Lake community.

Peter's wandering is more the type of wandering that springs from the concretization of the Mormon group. In a sense, so are these stories I'm discussing. Because we identify strongly with wanderers but we now find ourselves firmly entrenched in a Franklin-carrying, correlated society, we find other avenues, namely the intellectual and the spiritual, to wander in. Peter's departure, more theological than spiritual, represents the potential separation of any member of the Mormon society. As Jenny says,

*He had taken that which was latent in [his Mormon relatives], the oddness from a hundred years earlier, polygamy, mysticism, the darkness in every person, and had amplified it a hundredfold, becoming crazy.*  
(Bennion, 136)

The great danger of the group is this potential for aberration. Peter's lack of diversity, his earlier sexual repression, most of all the closing of most avenues of expression, make his eventual escape all the more dangerous.

I'd like to make clear that Peter's limitations, though perhaps influenced by the Mormon group, are by no means sponsored by it. His problems are real because he has created them. At one point Jenny says that the most important idea of her life is "that the creations of the imagination are indistinguishable from the creations of the senses" (Bennion, 133).

This concept is vital to understanding not only Peter, but all wanderers and their perceived problems. Their limbo is a real world. If, like Jenny, your spouse wants you to jump off the Church Office Building in order to "be transformed from flesh to light and flame" (Bennion, 155), you are not dealing with just a silly idea, but with hard reality. Our intellectual and spiritual wanderings have just as much weight, just as many consequences as our pioneer forefathers and foremothers' actions and decisions did. We can stray as far as the Donner Party (or the Iron County Militia) or we can stick as closely as E. T. Benson and Erastus Snow. What



I'm arguing for, I suppose, is an admission that intellectual wandering, mental exploring, is as valid an avenue of exploration as physical wandering.

With that said, we turn our attention away from the mental wanderers, those characters like Jenny, Peter and Floyd who find escape, as we do, through largely intellectual exercise. The most profound wanderers are the ones the group can't understand, those so physically removed from the group that their presence is taken as a mystery, their actions somehow mystical or incapable of being known, those, in short, whose limbo is so complete we can't begin to access even a part of it. There are several good stories whose extreme characters fit this description and would be excellent subjects in this search. Among them are Neil Chandler's "The Last Nephite," Phyllis Barber's "Wild Sage," Michael Fillerup's "Hozhogoo Nanina Doo," Levi Peterson's "Night Soil" and "The Christianizing of Coburn Heights," Douglas Thayer's "Dolf" and "Mr. Wahlquist in Yellowstone," John Bennion's "Dust," and Linda Sillitoe's "Coyote Tracks."

The story I've chosen is Levi Peterson's "The Last Nephite," mainly because it has many of the same features of these stories, and because it manages to rewrite the Three Nephite genre. Those of you familiar with the titles I've mentioned may have noticed that they all have one or two things in common. They deal with individuals who have left the Same for the Other, and/or they deal with interfaces between the Same and the Other, i.e., between the group and the Three Nephites, or some kind of otherworldly-guided character.

The otherworldly-guided character in "The Third Nephite" is Simpson, a hitchhiker. The main character, Otis Wadby, picks him up between Junction and Circleville, Utah. Otis has been sleeping nights at his son's house in Junction, "his wife having expelled him . . . because he had taken up with Fundamentalist notions."<sup>5</sup> Simpson, like many of Peterson's characters, is a grotesque:

*The hitchhiker was a runty fellow: hollow chest;  
scrofulous neck; Adam's apple big as somebody's elbow;  
yellow mustache running from nose to ears like*

*a shaggy hedgerow dividing his face into plowed,  
pitted properties; bleary eyes with gummy corners.  
He said he was a Mormon. (Peterson, 19)*

What's more, he claims to be one of the Three Nephites. Otis, since his association with Connor Stuart, a self-styled Fundamentalist prophet, is profoundly cynical of anything that smacks of the official church. He immediately writes Simpson off as a lunatic, drives through Circleville, and lets him off outside of town. Simpson, however, isn't that easy to dismiss. He shows up at the feed store Otis and his brother Angus run, ostensibly to help clear a sewer line.

Peterson wisely leaves our interpretation of Simpson wide open throughout the story. Events that can be interpreted as miraculous or even a little too coincidental are described matter-of-factly, leaving the reader to fill in any assumption of divine intervention. For example, Otis is informed by Connor that he is to take Marva Brinkerheisly, a "spinster school teacher of thirty-five or forty," a woman "whom even a sex fiend wouldn't have thought of molesting," as his second wife (Peterson, 32). When Otis tries to summon some sort of divine confirmation of this mismatch, he gets a wounded magpie—which he first thinks is a dove—down the stove pipe at the feed store. When Otis throws the bird outside, he sees Simpson "at the corner of the building with an air rifle in his hands" (Peterson, 33).

Though the sign has been given in a hilariously perverse way, Otis decides to talk to Marva anyway. Again, when things seem to be working out for Otis to ask Marva to become wife number two, there is an abrupt disruption: "A man, wildly waving a shovel, broke around the corner of the schoolhouse. It was Simpson. The dog [he was chasing] resumed its flight" (Peterson, 35). The moment for Otis to make his move passes. Otis goes back to the feed store, fills an order for his current wife, Polly, and begins to miss her company again. As she leaves, we are told that Otis "could have cried, she looked so nice" (Peterson, 37). On his sad way back to Junction, Otis sees Simpson again, hitchhiking on the road ahead. When Otis tries to drive past, a tire

blows out. We have reached the climax of the story in Otis's showdown with Simpson, who tries to help Otis change the tire. Simpson reveals to a furious Otis that his mission in Circleville is "to kick [Otis] out of [his] orbit around that pestiferous, piratical Connor Stuart" (Peterson, 37-38). And after some harsh words about the condition of Otis's eternal soul, he disappears.

This brings up an interesting aspect of this most extreme of wanderer types. In terms of my earlier theorizing, it's downright paradoxical. If, indeed, we are both attracted to the wanderer—or, more truthfully, to the idea of the quest—and repulsed by the strangeness of the Other, why is it that we somehow expect the wanderer to return us to the group? Otis Wadby, convinced finally by Simpson's vanishing act, burns his Fundamentalist books and goes home to Polly. The same urge, the same (more or less) resolution occurs in almost every Three Nephite story, be it fiction or pure folklore. The stranger, whose otherness is not even fathomable, causes reconciliation within the group.

There could be—and are, I suppose—many different interpretations about why this happens. Perhaps in a world of subjects and objects this is inevitable; the stranger serves as a definer of the group's borders by standing sentry just outside them. In this sense, the wanderer is redefined, as Peterson redefines the Three Nephites, as the trickster, whose antics serve as a teaching tool. The trickster tales of the Native Americans have long been used to teach initiates where the group's ideals of appropriateness are.

However, this limits our limitless, limbo-dwelling wanderer too much, defines the type so closely that the character becomes stereotypic. Many mystical, outside-the-group characters, despite their worldliness, are—paradoxically—stereotypes. However, with "The Third Nephite," we have been given a character who breaks the traditional helpful Nephite stereotype yet enforces the ultimately useful Nephite stereotype. However much we try to access the wanderer's limbo, we still end up molding him or her to the group's ideals, the group's *morés*.

In any case, though, the wanderer is a valid, dynamic character type. Our own experiences in a strange land fuel this subtheme of breaking boundaries, becoming independent, losing sometimes that independence, getting lost, getting found; in short, this subtheme speaks about the human experience, ties us back into the continual struggle each of us face between our urge for independence and our reliance on the group.

Since our beginnings, when we were expelled from the divine group, we have been wandering around, trying to find—what? Our way back? Some sort of magical king's highway that negates the necessity of losing our way occasionally? I think the wandering, the exploring, serves more of a purpose than that. Though we may have a good idea, we don't know where or when, in what land of our journey we will find truth. In our wandering, it is vital to know that truth can be found anywhere, even (or especially) among the Other. Until we have found all truth, we will, like these characters, be wanderers, explorers. All we have to know is that truth is what we seek. It doesn't really matter, then, where we start. It's where we end up that counts.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Derk Michael Koldewyn delivered this paper at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 25 January 1992 at Westminster College in Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Fillerup, *Visions and Other Stories* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 3. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by author and page number.

<sup>3</sup>"Grit and Insight." *Sunstone* 15, no. 4 (September 1991): 57.

<sup>4</sup>John Bennion, "Jenny, or Captured by the Mormons," in his *Breeding Leah and Other Stories* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 119. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by author's name and page number.

<sup>5</sup>Levi S. Peterson, *Night Soil: New Stories* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 19. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by author's name and page number.

# Reading Mormon Stories: An Ethical Dilemma?

Neal W. Kramer<sup>1</sup>

WE MORMONS ARE SURROUNDED by stories. Stories by Mormons. Stories about Mormons. News stories. Short stories. Anecdotes. Rumors. Jokes. Gossip. In fact, Mormonism itself often seems as much an unfolding, continuing narrative as anything else. Joseph in the grove. Joseph at Liberty, then Carthage. Brigham in Emigration Canyon. Lorenzo Snow in the Salt Lake Temple. Ezra Taft Benson's mission of compassion to the European Saints following World War II. And so our stories abound. But, caught as we are in the narrator's spell, what controls do we have against narrative exaggeration? What happens when the "facts" and the narrative don't appear to correspond? Or do what we call the "facts" have prior claims against the "inspirational" and "faith-promoting" stories that are thrust daily upon us by peddlers of "Mormon" products? Can such books, tapes, and videos be fairly evaluated? Or ought we even to question the integrity of such inspirationally motivated products?

Most literary scholars, trained as we are to define quality, like to think that all stories should be read with some caution. That is, we believe there is a way to measure or analyze how and why some stories are better than others. Even though we can't always agree on criteria for evaluation, we do tend to agree that not all stories are equally valuable. Some are better crafted than others. Some have a more direct bearing on contemporary social problems. Still others make powerful claims about how we ought to believe. Some stories even invite us to change our most basic behaviors. And these are the kinds of stories that I want to talk about: stories that claim to offer high values and positive ethical models for behavior modification. These seem to

me to be among the most important claims Mormon stories make. "Read me or listen to me," they almost shout from the shelves and from behind the plastic shrink wrap, "and I'll make you a better Mormon." Certainly the popularity of these stories with Latter-day Saints would indicate that we think the stories are good for us. But how may we critically evaluate such claims?

Wayne C. Booth, in his recent book *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, offers a nondogmatic and critically satisfying approach to evaluating the ethics of stories. He calls it "coduction." Coduction begins our appraisal of the ethics of a particular story with our prior experience of other stories. The wider one's acquaintance with stories, then, the richer possible comparisons become. Thus, coduction is always comparative and never absolute, a virtue of pluralism.<sup>2</sup> Even with the idea of ongoing comparison, though, we must have some standard of internal and external measure for evaluation. Under the rubric of "friendship," Booth offers seven broad categories of coduction against which we may measure the positive or negative virtues of ethical offers made by specific stories: (1) quantity/ concision, (2) reciprocity/hierarchy, (3) intimacy/cool reserve, (4) intensity/slack "charm," (5) tight coherence/explosive disunity, (6) otherness/familiarity, and (7) breadth of range/concentration.

While each category seems to represent a range of effects that might imply one of the two poles as better than the other, Booth recognizes that in different stories one or the other pole might be the better choice, though Aristotle's notion of balance is extremely important in setting up the contrasts. Too much or too little is the key to this measure.

He also does not mean to codify any particular experience as inherently better or worse than another; as we continue reading, our relative evaluations of stories will fluctuate.<sup>3</sup> This comparatist model should help us to evaluate what appears to me to be the most common Mormon story: the anecdotal account of a miracle, or experience with the Holy Spirit.

For the purposes of this essay I've chosen to examine four stories: "Death in a Foxhole" by Paul H. Dunn, "An Unusual Boy" by Matthew Cowley, the healing and conversion of an opera singer from "The Patterns of My Faith: Surprises of the Spirit" by Richard Cracroft, and a woman's ability to learn to forgive from *The Lord's Way* by Dallin H. Oaks. These four are generally representative, I think, of the genre of miracle stories that enjoin changes in our own conduct.

My justification for choosing these stories is quite simple. They are extremely popular with Mormons generally, and the people who buy these books or check them out actually read them, though more and more we like to listen to or watch and be inspired by audio and video tapes, as well. The storyteller has become easily the most popular fireside speaker in our culture. Certainly Paul H. Dunn was extraordinarily popular with young people because of the way he could tell story after story. Elder Dunn's devotionals have always been the best attended and most enjoyed at Ricks College, where I teach. Students can often remember the themes of his speeches weeks and even months after he has gone. Our multiple library copies of the three volumes of *Outstanding Stories by General Authorities*, which contain twenty or thirty of Elder Dunn's stories, are well used and worn. To a teacher whose assignments are forgotten as soon as they are turned in and whose lectures seldom leave the classroom, such success is enviable indeed. In someone also vulnerable to a touch of cynicism, like me, such enormous popularity demands a little critical skepticism, so let us turn then to the seven categories and evaluate these four stories.

## Quantity/Concision

When speaking of stories, we commonly talk about "how much they have to say" as a partial measure of excellence. Richer, more valuable sto-

ries tell us more about what it means to be human. They reward us amply for time spent engaged as readers, especially during the time we are reading, and they invite us to return for enrichment again and again. An example of stories with less value might be the short commercials on TV, with their implied narratives and sparkling punchlines. They are wonderfully funny for twenty seconds, but the aggravation caused by innumerable repetitions makes me want to be less and less "like Mike."

None of the four stories I examined is particularly long. Many of them were originally part of public addresses and so provided support for a larger rhetorical purpose. But they do stand alone. Interestingly enough, the stories do not appear to want to describe the workings of the Spirit in analytical detail. Instead, they try to recreate a series of emotions and to transmit them as accurately as possible to an audience that was not present at the original event. In essence, then, the audience should feel the power of the experience but not think too hard about what it might have consisted of in its larger detail. If the story can be concentrated into a narrative that lasts no longer than five minutes in the telling, so much the better.

Since these stories are often written down, we can assume that their authors hope we might be able to return to them for further inspiration. And unlike those irritating commercials I mentioned, it is easy to hear or read such stories a number of times without becoming too jaded. I think it is proper to mention, though, that anthologies of these stories quickly do become repetitive and somewhat boring. Quantity of time spent or amount of analysis is not an issue, then, with these stories; but the intensity of emotion created by a taut, brief narrative is essential to their success.

## Reciprocity/Hierarchy

Some writers imply that we, their readers, are essentially their equals in imagination, intellect, etc. Others want us to know from the very beginning that we readers are their inferiors and have come to worship at the throne of genius. The extreme of reciprocity is the writer who is highly honored that

we would even bother to open a work to its preface. The extreme of hierarchy might be described as an almost intolerable arrogance. I think of writers like Milton or Samuel Johnson here.

The writers of inspirational stories fall somewhere in the middle. The four authors of the stories I've considered here might be ranked in the following order, from most reciprocal to most hierarchical: Cracroft, Cowley, Oaks, and Dunn. Cracroft presents himself as one of us, as amazed at the workings of the spirit in his life as we are. His persona is very much the English teacher in the light blue leisure suit, who just happens to be the president of the Switzerland Zurich Mission or the one who used to sign your temple recommend. There is no attempt to insinuate himself into the center of the narrative, though his skill as a writer and his obvious craftsmanship do belie this persona somewhat.<sup>4</sup>

Elder Cowley is especially interesting in this regard. He is the apostle of miracles, yet he must seek out a friend, a young nameless bishop, to take to the hospital with him, "for I think his faith is greater than mine."<sup>5</sup> The center of this story is a young boy, but the narrative is all Cowley. One cannot help feeling that while the youngster is remarkable in his faith, the author is equally remarkable in his priesthood power. The humor and self-deprecation dazzle in a way that must call attention to the superiority of the speaker. And we know he is an apostle.

Elder Oaks recounts the experience of a wounded Latter-day Saint in need of the healing balm that comes from learning to forgive. This woman, a victim of sexual abuse, is presented as noble in her desires and her faith as she is spiritually healed of her anger toward the brother who abused her.<sup>6</sup> Elder Oaks stays very much in the background, but the solemn style, overt seriousness, and context of the story leave little doubt of his authority in these matters. He speaks as one with authority, somewhat distant and careful to protect his special position. And it is entirely appropriate to the circumstances.

I'm a little uneasy in characterizing Paul Dunn as the most hierarchical of the four writers. He seems so friendly and familiar when he speaks. But in the

story of his friend's death in a foxhole in the South Pacific, the narrator takes center stage. Harold's last words are ultimately less important than the report of the storyteller that "I was able to fulfill that commitment."<sup>7</sup> The narrative has a touch of the self-aggrandizing about it. Elder Dunn must share the spotlight with his friend, and perhaps that is why he has falsified some of the details.<sup>8</sup> The narrator is just intrusive enough that we unconsciously find ourselves admiring him for having had the experience instead of feeling the spirit the story was supposed to communicate. So we end up praising Dunn, obviously superior to us, and inevitably distant because of it.

## Intimacy/Cool Reserve

Some storytellers want to invite you into their very souls, as it were. They want you to know everything about them, to become bosom friends. Others would rather have you stay away; their very tone of voice erects barriers, replete with spiritual "No Trespassing" signs. They are quite formal and reserved, preferring to stay at least an arm's length away. But extremes tell the real story. Too much intimacy violates the reader's sense of self. Too close, too cloying, somewhat sycophantic. And too distant leaves us feeling cold, unwanted, unnecessary, almost as if the author thought people like us might try to eavesdrop and so has taken every precaution to keep us out.

Each of these Mormon stories wants to produce intimacy rather than distance. Each writer hopes the narrative will help to reproduce a spiritual experience by which all the members of the audience will be drawn closer to God. But there is a sad and unintended paradox associated with this desire. If the readers cannot reproduce an account of a similar personal experience in their own minds, instead of being drawn closer to the spirit of the story they can be forced away. Instead of inviting spiritual abundance, the narrative creates spiritual distance. The reader feels his or her own spirituality to be so much beneath the author's that no connection can be made, no intimacy shared. At this point the tabernacle podium becomes an unhappy

symbol of the special spiritual power of Church leaders in contrast to the spiritual weakness and near depravity of everyday Mormons.

## Intensity/Slack "Charm"

To describe the level of intensity a reader brings to a text, or the level of engagement a text demands of a reader, is very difficult. Part of what keeps readers with a good story includes development of characters and action that are riveting enough that we simply can't put the story down. Sometimes it includes skillful use of imagery and figures of speech. At other times it might include well-crafted and carefully constructed arguments of the sort we might find in a dialogue by Plato or lengthy philosophical digressions in novels by Thomas Mann or Boris Pasternak.

Mormon inspirational stories all try to generate intense emotion in their readers. We recognize that emotion and the Spirit go together and hope that the emotion generated by our stories will invite the Spirit and edify. As you probably have gathered from what I said above, the notion of ethos or authorial character is critical to any evaluation of a text inside these categories. What sort of author is implied and how does that affect my relation with the text? A variety of characters can generate keen emotion and desire. Singers, poets, comedians, entertainers, salesmen, pitch-men, political candidates and preachers can all whip a crowd into an emotional frenzy. They can generate desires in me that I have never felt before.

How intensely do I want to feel emotion and be moved toward an author? What about the seductive charmer, whose ability to make me have brief, but powerful desires, might be able to convince me to do almost anything just once? This category frightens me the most. I am sentimental, easily moved to tears and ready to believe that a good weep with my fellow Saints is the best ratification of the Spirit I can find. If I can make my students cry with me, I must be a good, spiritual teacher. In fact, the students who cry with me always give higher teacher evaluations than those who don't.

The four stories I have considered do not rush toward easy sentimentality. They are good stories that keep me with them from beginning to end. They make me want to trust the narrators. In fact, they sometimes make me want to be just like the implied narrators.

But Paul Dunn's foxhole story is unnerving. That touch of ego that slips into the picture begins to resemble a sleazy "charm" that I associate with the salesman who knows I should buy a car from him because he would never lie to me. Worse than the implied author of the foxhole story, though, is the Dunn clone. We all know him from firesides, tapes, and devotionals. The rhetorical pyrotechnics are everywhere. The jokes are a little too long and too funny. The stories of immediate conversions of members of heavy metal bands at the funerals of dead teenagers and the power of God manifested so plainly at the scene of mass murders have a modern seductive charm about them. They are so much like TV and popular music. They are so stimulating and never boring. That's how the Spirit works. Or is it?

On a very minor scale, these stories that I associate most with seminary teachers and other CES employees create their own little cults of personality. After hearing such a story, instead of commenting on its content, we might say something like "Boy, he's a great speaker." That is the purpose of the story: To leave us with a sense of how remarkable and popular that real author is. And herein lies the ethical problem. The charmer puts himself ahead of any other purpose, while claiming to invite the Spirit and edify the audience. Elder James E. Faust gives this account of flattering charm: "Satan is the world's master in the use of flattery, and he knows the great power of speech."<sup>9</sup> In another context, Murray Kempton put it this way: "Charm is the ultimate refinement of Satan's work." Quoting Andrei Konchalovsky, Kempton continues: "Spiritual tragedy occurs when you realize that you have been seduced—" or Booth might say charmed—"because you are implicated in your own victimization."<sup>10</sup> Because we confuse sentiment and spirituality under the influence of seductive charmers, we often mistake tears of adoration for tears of joy. I know I do.

## Tight Coherence/Explosive Disunity

Some stories exhibit deep contradictions and paradoxes, hoping to convince us that they are essential to any sincere or authentic narrative. Others provide us with tight coherence, a sense of almost absolute adherence to order and form. For them, nothing is ever out of place. You follow the pattern and the results are as regular as clockwork.

These Mormon stories all present their actions as consistent and coherent. In fact, coherence is crucial to their success. The narratives must conform with patterns of righteousness and follow the rules of inviting the spirit because they are all at root faith promoting. We need our faith to be normalized. If we obey the commandments, we want to know that spiritual signs will follow our belief. These stories support our basic belief in the orderliness of the gospel.

Elder Cowley's story presents men and a boy of faith. In conjunction with their faith, the sick little boy is physically healed. Our faith connects with theirs and as a direct and orderly result it is strengthened. Elder Dunn presents a last request that is faithfully carried out. We see ourselves as more loyal to friends, more trustworthy in dire situations, and more willing to sacrifice for our country when it calls. President Cracroft shows us the surprises of the Spirit, and we are less surprised when they appear also to have happened to us under similar circumstances. Elder Oaks logically presents an explanation of patterns and practices, supported by a story that follows the exact pattern. These are stories that reflect the order of God's household.

## Otherness/Familiarity

Some stories present themselves as exactly the same kind of story we've always read and liked. If you pick up your fifth Robert Ludlum thriller, you are not likely to be disappointed by a strange otherness. Ludlum has a pattern, style, and character profile that hardly changes from book to book. His readers love him because he never changes. Barbara Cartland and Louis L'Amour are always safe bets for readers, because their stories are familiar, warm

and safe to the already initiated. Other stories delight in moving us away from the familiar and safe. They desire to generate discomfort, to make us ill at ease. They want to challenge our sense of ourselves, to invite us to remake ourselves according to new models. I think here of *Finnegan's Wake* or *The Sound and the Fury*.

Mormon inspirational stories want to be familiar. If you have heard or read an inspirational story before, you can recognize a new one coming. They target an already LDS audience, with the goal of supporting traditional views of spirituality, celebrating the saving conventions of our society. The stories are simple and straightforward mimetic accounts of actual events, always with the same positive outcome. Whether the story is set in France, China, or Cache Valley, the conclusion will always be the same. One of the Saints will be in need of spiritual help. Often through priesthood power, a miracle will occur and our belief in the gifts of the Spirit will be fortified by our knowledge of yet another actual occurrence when the outcome of a crisis turned out to be exactly as we expected it would be. The stories calm our fears and invite us to revivify our belief in the orderliness of the simple and familiar.

Contained within the idea of the familiar, though, is also the idea of otherness. Again, the paradox of reading these stories comes when our own experience is not congruent with familiar models. At that level, these stories may become threatening. They challenge our well-being, our sense that God's desires for us are the same as for all his children. Then these stories can become alienating and spiritually enervating. They may even lead to a kind of spiritual self-deception, where we craft fictions according to generic patterns in order to buy a sort of respectability in the community. This need to create self-affirming fictions is a part of our society, and may partially result from presentation of miraculous experiences as common and everyday for all Latter-day Saints.

## Breadth of Range/Concentration

Think of the scope that the world's different stories might offer. *The Odyssey* brings a whole world in all its variety, contrast, and beauty to all readers.

Yet it remains focused; it hardly ever seems to ramble. Other stories are very concentrated. After the metamorphosis, we stay in Gregor Samsa's apartment until he dies. But we can sense when a story is too broad. It simply covers too much and covers it poorly. And the reverse is also true. Some stories are too narrow. They trivialize events, making everything seem just a little too simple and plain. Why tell a story if it only recounts my fifth successful attempt at crossing a street on the green light today?

The four Mormon stories are all concentrated. Each takes place in a single space and tries to recreate an intersection between a spiritual reality and a specific temporal moment. The events described happen in a dressing room at the opera, a muddy foxhole, a hospital, and a private residence. But while there is concentration, a great breadth is also implied. For the stories indicate that the power of God is omnipresent. Wherever a member may be in need, the Spirit can penetrate and heal. And ultimately this breadth is always more important than the specific details of a given miracle. When we examine these stories carefully, we even discover that the careful detail we associate with the finest fiction is absent. These narrators don't want to detract from the spirit of the occasion by cluttering their accounts with too many details. In some ways, the interchangeability of the experiences validates the universality of the gospel and our belief that it is not susceptible to contingencies of time or place.

Having now been briefly through these seven ethical categories, we ought at least to have drawn some tentative conclusions about Mormon stories of inspiration. My strongest impression of these stories is their very conservative nature. They encourage us to cast our spiritual experience in simple narrative patterns that are both regular and conventional. They encourage us to see the activities of the Holy Spirit as relevant to all our lives in the same basic ways. They teach us to recognize times and places where miracles may be expected, even if they come unexpectedly. They discourage highly individual and esoteric spirituality. They indicate that our spiritual lives are controlled in part by communal and institutional needs more than by indi-

vidual needs. In valuable ways these stories bring our worldwide church together and keep it in place by implying a standard of spiritual conduct that is relevant in all times and all places because it is so simple and direct.

On the other hand, the stories also present some rather disconcerting possibilities. Because the stories are so simple, they are easily counterfeited. Their easy reliance on intense emotionalism allows readers to confuse a variety of emotional responses with feeling the Holy Spirit. We value the presence of the Holy Spirit in our community so highly that claims to spiritual guidance enable those who may only have mastered a narrative pattern to have special purchase on our adulation and respect. We tend to value the simple over the complex and so are prone to appreciate appearance over substance.

All of these conclusions reflect the ethical dilemma hinted at in my title. For as the Church continues to grow and spread across the world at its current rapid pace, I believe we will come to rely on these stories even more than we do now. Their simplicity minimizes differences that could otherwise cause major rifts in both the institution and the community but also masks the genuine diversity that could enrich our community. The move we now sense taking place across the Church to simplify programs and limit centralized control may ironically have just the opposite effect. It may turn out to keep us all similar and together in a simple harmony, uncluttered by the diversity of the life experiences of our members and the contingency of our cultural matrices. And that end would, I believe, hurt our ability to fulfill one of our basic Mormon responsibilities: taking the gospel to all God's children. "For it shall come to pass in that day, that *every* man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his *own* tongue, and in his *own* language" (D&C 90:11; italics mine).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Neal W. Kramer is an instructor of English at Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho. This paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 25 January 1992 at Westminster College of Salt Lake City.



<sup>2</sup>Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 70-75.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 179-95.

<sup>4</sup>Richard H. Cracroft, "The Patterns of My Faith: Surprises of the Spirit," *Sunstone* 15, no. 4 (October 1991): 26-27. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by author's name and page number.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew Cowley, "He Was an Unusual Boy," in *Outstanding Stories by General Authorities, Vol. 2*, edited by Leon R. Hartshorn (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 64. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by author's name and page number.

<sup>6</sup>Oaks, Dallin H., *The Lord's Way* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 173-74. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by author's name and page number.

<sup>7</sup>Paul H. Dunn, "Death in a Foxhole," in *Outstanding Stories by General Authorities, Volume 1*, edited by Leon R. Hartshorn (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 69. Additional quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by author's name and page number.

<sup>8</sup>Lynn Packer, "Paul H. Dunn: Fields of Dreams," *Sunstone* 15, no. 3 (September 1991): 41-42.

<sup>9</sup>"The Great Imitator," *Ensign*, November 1987,

<sup>10</sup>"The Charms of Terror," *New York Review of Books*, 30 January 1992, 18.

# Toward a Theory of Literary Value: The Necessity of Bearing Personal Testimony

Harlow Soderborg Clark<sup>1</sup>

IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, the pleasure I received, the shock of recognition (as Robert Anderson called one of his plays), at reading along in a secular critic and coming across this passage:

*I do not know how other teachers deal with this extravagant personal force of modern literature, but for me it makes difficulty. Nowadays the teaching of literature inclines to a considerable technicality, but when the teacher has said all that can be said about formal matters, about verse-patterns, metrics, prose conventions, irony, tension, etc., he must confront the necessity of bearing personal testimony. He must use whatever authority he may possess to say whether or not a work is true, and if not, why not; and if so, why so. He can do this only at considerable cost to his privacy.<sup>2</sup>*

I'm sure that when Lionel Trilling wrote about the trepidation he felt at teaching the first modern literature class at Columbia College, he wasn't thinking about the resonance his words would have for a critic reading them in light of, say, the last ten years' debate over how Mormon history ought to be written. He may not even have had in mind the kind of resonance his words would have for the same critic reading this passage:

*People who are looking for "a lot of interesting ideas," and hope to dabble here for little more, offend the author and degrade themselves. They would do well to stop right now. Those who read to take action on their consequent beliefs—these are the only readers I respect or look for.<sup>3</sup>*

or this passage:

*No doubt we shall soon see Marxist criticism comfortably wedged between Freudian and mytho-*

*logical approaches to literature, as yet one more stimulating academic "approach," one more well-tilled field of inquiry for students to tramp. Before this happens, it is worth reminding ourselves of a simple fact. Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that means, rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression. There is nothing academic about those struggles, and we forget this at our cost.<sup>4</sup>*

The first passage comes from Jonathan Kozol's scathing attack on American public education, *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far From Home*. I mention it in passing because I am impressed, in reading what I have of Kozol, that what is an unabashedly leftist vision is also an unabashedly religious vision. We all know that true religion involves "visit[ing] the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27), but it also involves doing these things in an undefiled fashion "before God and the Father," and Kozol shows no hesitation, in talking about how we should behave towards the illiterate, the homeless, and those who are otherwise afflicted, at saying that feeding, clothing, educating our people—empowering them politically—is a duty we owe not only to them, but to our God as well.

The second passage comes from Terry Eagleton's *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (published by the University of California Press). Eagleton's vision is also a religious vision, though he would surely call it political—more on that later. In considering these three statements over some time, I am struck by a number of things. One is that, having spent years in Mormon classrooms I have a very good sense of

what is involved in being in a situation where teacher—and, I might add, students—feel strongly enough about works of literature and about their personal convictions of how the world functions to bring those convictions to bear on their discussion and interpretation of a literary work. Another thing that strikes me is that this was not my first reaction. My first reaction was to ask myself why I wouldn't expect to find a statement like Eagleton's in a similar book by an LDS critic. During graduate school I started doing some work on how the idea that the universe depends for its existence upon the pairing of opposites makes itself felt in the work of LDS writers. I find it difficult to imagine taking the manuscript of my study to the University of California Press with a statement like this in the foreword:

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on the earth. What that means in concrete terms is that the narrative Mormonism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from the bondage and oppression of sin. There is nothing academic about those struggles, and we forget this at our cost.*

I find it difficult to imagine most Mormon critics I know including such a statement in a scholarly book. Perhaps that is because we share the reticence Richard Cummings expressed in his presidential address several years ago about being the handmaidens (or even lackeys) of the Church.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is from a sense of insecurity. As Marden Clark reminded this body several years ago, it has only been within his professional lifetime that American literature (let alone regional literatures of various kinds) has been thought a fit subject for the academy. That the fear of provincialism that led him into literary theory ("No one was going to accuse this farmer-trucker of slighting the tough stuff."<sup>6</sup>) still operates among us is evident in Phyllis Barber's recent statement that perhaps Mormon writers who try to take their world to the larger world are only kidding themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Or perhaps there is something else at work, a desire not to claim too much for ourselves. Here is Levi Peterson talking about both his mother, and

the parents of Arabella Gurney in "The Canyons of Grace": "She converses daily with God. She is strongly dependent on him and strictly heeds his commandments. She doubts her salvation yet hopes for ultimate forgiveness."<sup>8</sup>

If we really believe there are many great and marvelous things yet to be revealed, it is a little arrogant to assume that we already have all truth (or even salvation), so we need to be open not only to whatever truth presents itself to us, but to what is and is not truth. Thus we have Phyllis Barber saying,

*As I create, I am searching, exploring, letting my creation guide me. If I already know everything, I close my ears to new voices or ideas that may want to exercise themselves; there is no place for creativity to breathe.*

This observation leads Barber to a question, "Is everything finished for us to observe and comment upon, or does God want us to make additions and corrections to the text?" and a further observation, "Our main connection to God may be our imagination."<sup>9</sup> Barber says all this in response to a couple of passages from *The Perpetual Orgy: Flaubert and Madame Bovary*, in which Mario Vargas Llosa compares Brecht to Flaubert, saying that Brecht is a schoolmaster writing stories to teach life's lessons to his pupils, whether they may want such a lesson or not. Flaubert, on the other hand is a weaver, hiding his truth (or truths) within the pattern of the story—and perhaps finding new truths in the weaving.

Now this sense that truth is internal and implicit traces back to a rather terrifying document called the Sermon on the Mount, in which the one giving the sermon looks at the existence of hypocrisy, the fact that people are capable of insincere action, and radically reinterprets his whole culture in light of that fact, suggesting that you cannot even tell from the physical aspect of an action, even so seemingly benign an action as praying, or bringing a gift up to the altar of the temple, whether that action is righteous or unrighteous. The righteousness or unrighteousness of an action depends on

the condition of the actor's heart; and only God knows what is in a person's heart. This is emphasized by the rather startling image of a roofing beam. It is not a speck of sawdust in our eye that clouds our vision, but rather the whole beam (Matt. 5:21-24, 21-48; 6:1-18; 7:1-5).

In the area of literature, this truth means that it is entirely possible to, for example, write poetry or fiction that is thoroughly grounded in a Mormon tradition and upbringing, could not have been written without that tradition, and yet which reflects that tradition not at all.<sup>10</sup> If this sounds a little odd, let me offer an analogy. It is almost immediately apparent to someone reading my own fiction or poetry that I am a Latter-day Saint and could not have written the poem or story without that background. What is not so immediately apparent is that I am also a Clark, with a specific background and heritage, and that I could not write the way I do without that background, tradition, heritage, and upbringing. We all carry with us a heritage that informs everything we do but is not readily discernible, if at all.

I have spent considerable time on the question of why I would not expect a Mormon critic to include a statement like Eagleton's in a scholarly manuscript, not because that is the subject of my paper, but because several of the reasons which presented themselves to me have to do with both literary theory and religious beliefs, and literary theory is secular theology—study of the secular canon.

Perhaps because he had never been to college or received formal training for the ministry, Joseph Smith understood that creeds and theology are the expression and study of a closed canon and of the God who closed and keeps closed the canon. All creeds have some truth, he noted, "but I want to come up unto the presence of God and learn all things but the creeds set up stakes, and say hitherto shalt thou come and no further."<sup>11</sup>

Creeds are a way of formally explicating a culture's beliefs. They are also at least a rung higher up the ladder of abstraction than direct experience of one's beliefs. (Saying "I believe in the laying on of hands" is a more abstract experience than laying

hands on someone and speaking the words of a healing blessing.) To the extent that creeds let you stand back from your beliefs and talk about them, they also bar you from that experience, and can indeed come to substitute for the experience. This is why Eagleton, in setting out to explicate the principles of Marxist criticism feels it necessary to warn his readers not to apply the principles of Marxist criticism to Marxism itself, not to simply use it as another tool in the critical arsenal, but as the very sword of truth.

The same dangers apply to a Latter-day Saint critic, along with an additional danger: Since the gospel includes "anything that is virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy"<sup>12</sup> an LDS critic who tries to expound uniquely LDS ideas may misrepresent the gospel by leaving out much that is virtuous, lovely, praiseworthy, but not of uniquely Latter-day Saint report. However, the opposite problem also exists: By not drawing upon our heritage for our ideas, we may miss what it has to offer or may miss answers or approaches to problems that cannot be gotten, or gotten fully from other sources. So, with the dangers of literary theorizing fully in mind, I want to examine Eagleton's approach to a rather unpopular problem in literary theory, the problem of value, compare it to the work of an LDS critic on the same problem, and add some commentary.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of the volume containing the caveat I read is to show how standing at a podium reading a paper like this (or sitting at a computer writing it), is not only *not* a waste of time, but is a revolutionary, liberating act. In another book, *Criticism and Ideology*, he takes up the question of value and evaluation. The title does not mean, "how to use literary criticism to further Marxist ideology," but rather, "how to use Marxist criticism to lay bare the ideological underpinnings of other critical approaches, or the ideological assumptions of a literary product." Marxism is not an ideology, but the truth by light of which we free ourselves from ideology. Which means that in considering value, Eagleton is setting out to answer the question of why we do and should value literature and art that

is rampantly ideological (or, in religious terms, tells us things that we know, from our deepest sense of how God's world functions, aren't true).

Eagleton's argument is fairly technical; and about the third or fourth time through it, it began to look something like this: We don't want to picture value as some kind of economic exchange between text and reader in which readers show themselves to be valuable by reading valuable texts and in which texts pick up value by being chosen by such valuable readers. We also don't want to assume that the value is immanent in the text, just waiting to be discerned in some mystical irrational fashion, or that value is merely subjective and exists only as it is projected onto the text by the reader. Therefore, we'll talk about the conditions under which a text was produced and is read. All people and all works exist within a complex set of conditions and circumstances, a heritage you might say, though Eagleton calls it a matrix. The value of a work of art depends on the energy and skill with which it exercises itself against the limits of its matrix, strains and flexes against its matrix, invites me to do the same, and strains and flexes me against itself.

Put this way, the argument began to sound rather familiar to me. It was an idea I had first heard in a sacrament meeting talk, which, like "What the Church Means to People Like Me," and other fine talks, had then made its way into print, under the title "Liberating Form," by Marden Clark, in which the good doctor says that we often think of form as something that binds us down, but it is actually something that marshalls and focuses our energy, and liberates us to act on that energy. Forms and rules are not, Dr. Clark says, some sort of necessary evil which we can turn to good purpose; they are a necessary good without which we can do nothing. To illustrate the argument he analyzes X. J. Kennedy's sonnet "Nothing in Heaven Functions as it Ought." For lack of time I will simply refer you to the June 1977 *Ensign* for the analysis or the longer version in *Liberating Form* and say that, given the situation in the world today (January 1991, the United Nations led into war by the United States), a more appropriate example is a poem that

appeared in *Dialogue's* peace issue a few years ago called "Unfinished Sestina for the Secretary of Defense."<sup>14</sup> Again, for lack of time, I will simply say that Kathy Evans has taken a form often considered so mannered and highly artificial as to be virtually useless and used it to marshal the energy of her words in a way that no other poetic form could and to release the energy of those words (in a way impossible without a form) in simulation of the energy released by a nuclear explosion.

For various reasons, Eagleton doesn't take his argument as far as Clark does, considering the value of limits to be only a temporary expedient until such time as we shall be "emancipated from material scarcity, liberated from labour," such time as we will not have to flex against our matrices to establish our value. In making this wish and emphasizing it by ending his book with it, Eagleton is making the same error he exposes so precisely in the first chapter of *Literary Theory: An Introduction*<sup>15</sup>—the error of basing an aesthetic in some past (therefore inaccessible and mythical) golden age, the difference being that his golden age is in the future.

I do not say this by way of refutation, only by way of noting that the value of Eagleton's approach is established by its limits; and though I do not think he understands how significantly his theory of value is weakened by the desire to finally be free of limits (a desire which surely fueled such things as *laissez faire* capitalism and the westward expansion of America, which mirrored the colonial expansions of the European powers), he couldn't have developed his theory without an intense concern for human freedom that finds limits repulsive because of their frequent use as a means of oppression.

But if Eagleton's theory of value is finally unsatisfying because he does not understand the liberating power of limits, it is, as I said, still valuable, and his approach yields some insights worth considering. What would he say, for example, about Mario Vargas-Llosa's weaver-aesthetic, and Brecht's teacher-aesthetic? He would undoubtedly point out that the man who espouses the weaver-aesthetic ran for and almost captured the Peruvian presidency on a conservative ticket,<sup>16</sup> while the man who es-

poused the teacher-aesthetic was considered such a dangerous liberal that the FBI kept a good-sized classified file on him. Though we may consider English departments to be hotbeds of liberalism, Eagleton notes in "The Rise of English," (Chapter 1 of *Literary Theory: An Introduction*) that instituting English as an academic subject matter was a conservative (read: oppressive) act, a backdoor way to let inferior students (read: women) into the academy. As opposed to Latin, English was considered sufficiently nontaxing that refined but intellectually incapable sensibilities could exercise themselves in it.

This conservative institution produced a New Criticism which, though in some respects revolutionary, was at heart deeply conservative<sup>17</sup> because it focused the students' attentions strictly on the text. This may not seem like a conservative thing to do, but consider the subject matter of much art of the last 150 years; consider also the methods used to teach that art in the university. Such a consideration is the basis of the Trilling essay I take my title from, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature." Trilling was initially hesitant to teach modern literature because it contains a great deal of destructive force, like a quinquereme (one of those great galleys that invades new worlds, bringing disease and pestilence) or a howitzer: a destructive force aimed at the society that had produced, and been produced by, centuries of European colonization and the industrial revolution.<sup>18</sup>

But Trilling's students at Columbia insisted, so he gave them modern literature with a vengeance, and was dismayed to find that they weren't devastated by it. Apparently they were able to contain the attack, plug up the barrel of the howitzer, chop down the masts of the quinquereme. Trilling moves from seeing this as a failure of the students to seeing it as a failure of the way we teach literature.

*Explain Stephen Daedalus's name. Show five examples of why the name is appropriate. Is it a better name than Stephen Hero? Why? Why not?*

*Compare references to body parts in "The Waste-land" and "Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop." Compare the attitude of the implied author of each poem toward the body, with the attitude of the characters in the poem.*

The odd thing about exam questions like these, Trilling says, is that we don't consider them odd. And once we've asked them, and trained our students to ask them—to view literature this way, we've robbed our students of whatever terror the author is conveying to them.

This account of the failure of pedagogy implies, or perhaps sidesteps, a question which needs to be stated explicitly: Suppose a student handed in the following as a term paper (or answer to an exam):

*Billy Budd has really left me dead in the water. Before reading it I felt like a quinquereme ready to take on the world. Now I feel as if a howitzer has come and blown away my prow, liberated my galley slaves. I don't know when I'll get things back under control, if ever, or how I'll navigate afterwards.*

Would that have been acceptable to Trilling as literary criticism? Would it be acceptable to you? If the student was male perhaps you would appreciate the wit of the castration/impotency image in the crippled oars and prow; if female perhaps you would appreciate the rape image in the howitzer. But witty as it is, would it acceptable literary criticism, either seen as satire, or as a straight response to *Billy Budd*?

I can't answer for you or for Trilling,<sup>19</sup> but I want to respond to the question by begging your indulgence, Trilling-style, for relating the stripped-down masts of a personal experience. I first read Eagleton in a graduate class called "Ethics and Aesthetics." I suppose Professor Charles Altieri's strong conviction that literary valuation is a highly ethical as well as aesthetic task accounts for Eagleton's inclusion on the list of books and chapters we could choose to report on. Now was as good a time as any to get some background in Marxist criticism.

I was quite annoyed by the technicality of Eagleton's argument, by my inability to grasp it, and by what I felt was a level of abstraction in talk-

ing about people that makes it easy to send people off to the Gulag (since Eagleton spends several pages on Trotsky's and others' attempts to formulate a new aesthetic for a new nation.<sup>20</sup>)

I observed that I felt offended by talking about people in abstract terms, and, referring to an Eagleton metaphor of production and consumption, added that my wife had been up all of the night before with the baby and I couldn't imagine her framing her relationship with the baby in Eagleton terms.

"Oooh, this sentimentality has got to stop," Altieri said. I responded that I found Eagleton sentimental in his insistence on using such abstract language in talking about people. He replied that literary criticism is a formal discipline, not a personal one. The purpose is not to talk about our feelings toward literature or our personal responses to it but about the literature itself. He expressed several times throughout the quarter the desire to keep personal experience out of literary criticism, which is why the first drafts of this paper were called "Narrative and the Personal: Notes Towards a Theory of Literary Value." Ironically, *Dialogue* rejected this paper as too technical. I felt it a sufficiently dry academic title and was pleased at the puns suggesting theory ought to have literary value, music (noun derived from the adjective form of muse). I have changed considerably my opinion towards Eagleton since he caught me unprepared and crippled my five banks of oars. No one was going to accuse this Friday-morning-beat-the-garbage-man-to-the-neighbors'-leaves-and-grass-clippings compost-maker of slighting the tough stuff, so I started back through Chapter 5 of *Criticism and Ideology*; and about the fourth or fifth time through, Eagleton's argument began to feel familiar and friendly to me. Here was someone who recognized the value of limits enough to build a theory of literary value around them, enough to find a way around the reticence Marxist critics might feel at dealing in the hierarchies implicit in valuation. It seemed to me that Eagleton would be a trenchant critic of the more

nihilistic aspects of French Criticism as well. Altieri confirmed this for me, saying that *Literary Theory: An Introduction* contained his response to them.

My excitement yielded to disappointment, though. One of my very interesting discoveries was that Marxism is essentially a Christian salvation religion, having much the same structure and millennial hopes;<sup>21</sup> hence Eagleton bearing his testimony at the beginning of *Marxism and Literary Criticism* and at the end of *Criticism and Ideology*. My disappointment stemmed from how Eagleton undercuts his argument by hoping for the day when things will no longer have to struggle against their limits to gain their value. I wrote that Eagleton's Marxism couldn't be the alternative to Christianity that he wanted it to be because he hadn't rejected the belief that the highest good was boundless, limitless.

Altieri commented that mine was a very good paper but that it would be better if I could find it in myself to be fairer to Eagleton. I wasn't sure what he meant by that, but I let it nag at me for a few years; and when I started revising the paper I kept it in mind, as well, I suspect, as a statement early in the class to the effect that it is probably not possible to refute an idea; the most we can do is to establish its boundaries. So I applied Eagleton's idea to itself and found considerable value in its limits.

I've mentioned this for several reasons. While not wanting to expose the tawdry details of my graduate education and my lack of preparation, I have an intense relation to words, especially written words; and I see little value (and perhaps much harm) in discussing that relationship impersonally.

A related reason involves honesty. Though I have not read as much of Kenneth Burke as I would like to and hope to, I took a class on the teaching of writing from William Irmscher, who developed the *Holt Guide to English: A Handbook of Rhetoric, Language, and Literature* (New York: Holt, 1972) on Burkean principles. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Burke's writing, one that Irmscher mentioned two or three times, is that he'll start down a path, then say, "Well, that may not be quite accurate. Maybe it's a little more like this." Then

he'll go down another path, backtrack again, until, when he gets to the idea he's writing about, we've travelled there with him, seen how he got there and why, rather than just meeting him there, or hearing a travel report of an exotic place. I recognize that this is also how I write. Perhaps this is partly because words spoken with passion and conviction can carry great moral authority, and readers being asked to respond to that kind of authority need to know the source of the words. It is easy to hide the impulse of speech behind the speech itself.<sup>22</sup>

One of my reasons for writing this section has been to explore in my own idiosyncratic way Eagleton's claim that, for all its revolutionary character (the rise of English as a discipline, the new criticism fostered by and and fostering the discipline, and the aesthetic legacy of that discipline), it was a bourgeois, hence conservative, revolution. I'm not sure Eagleton would approve of how personal this paper is, but I owe to him the suggestion that the impersonal, destructive nature of much criticism is not an unfortunate side effect of pedagogy, as Trilling and Walker Percy<sup>23</sup> suggest, but rather something built into the foundations of the discipline. If you want to educate oppressed people without endangering the oppressive society, he says in "The Rise of English," teach them that that force which does threaten the social order by examining and exposing it, is not about them at all, but about tropes, form, the text, metrics, tension, irony—anything, that is, but social change, which is an extratextual matter (wonderful dusty phrase, that).

Eugene England has suggested that it is the purpose of good satire to be wrongheaded, to (I take it) oversimplify and miss the point.<sup>24</sup> The wrongheadedness I sense in Eagleton's Satire is a sense that a corrupt tree, which we know is incapable of producing good fruit, is so wholly corrupt as to be incapable of trying to bring forth good fruit, or even wanting to. I'm not at all sure that the oppositions that challenge, modify, or even destroy an institution come from outside the institution.

For institutions as oppressive as, say, nineteenth-century British imperial capitalism, nineteenth-century American *laissez-faire* capitalism, or mid-twen-

tieth-century Soviet Marxism, I think I would have to be a bit Manichean to believe they were so powerful they could only be brought down from without. "People like that understand only one thing," we say, pointing to our rifles. I believe we give evil entirely too much credit for being a cohesive force that must be countered, met with, kept at bay by a more violent counterforce.<sup>25</sup> The Lord commanded us to resist not evil, and I have related elsewhere my discovery that the only time any lasting peace is achieved in the Book of Mormon is when people do just that and preach the Gospel. The Lamanites finally disband the Gadian-ton Robbers not by a military get-tough-on-crime campaign but by preaching the gospel.<sup>26</sup>

For this reason I believe that such things as socialism, labor unions, consumer and environmental movements are not aberrations of American and British capitalism anymore than Gorbachevs and Walesas and labor unions are aberrations of Soviet Marxism and its eastern-European derivatives. In some way, these modifying forces arise as a kind of check from the very impulse that causes people to want to create new systems, to organize, order, name.

Nor is Eagleton an aberration of the English department at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied or Oxford, where he teaches. He wasn't produced in spite of the oppressive history of his discipline and society but as a self-checking impulse built in from the foundation.

I believe that this self-checking impulse is true also of benign institutions. To refer back for a moment to a sacrament meeting talk I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Richard Poll's "What the Church Means to People like Me,"<sup>27</sup> his images of the Iron Rod and Liahona members are images of complementary opposites—each modifying and helping the other. Perhaps because the essay is often interpreted as an us vs. them contest, he emphasized in a fifteenth anniversary essay that both groups are headed for the tree, and have the means to get there.

A topic which has steadily interested me for the past several years is the intellectualism of the typical Mormon approach to Mormonism. For a



religion that emphasizes following the Spirit and the feelings, physical sensations, that accompany the Holy Ghost, our meetings and our singing are remarkably unemotional. To be sure there are plenty of tears and "My heart is full" in the bearing of testimony, but the tears are almost always accompanied by apology. An unselfconscious Brigham Young shouting out "Ha-a-a-le-lu-jah" in the middle of a meeting every time he thought about how blessed he was to have known Joseph Smith would be quite unsettling to us. Our emphasis is not on the fulness of the heart but on the words that overflow from that heart to quench the thirst of other members of the congregation.

I don't think it's an accident that the Church sponsors educational institutions that teach subjects such as philosophy, science, and literature that all partake of the destructive energy toward which Trilling expresses so much ambivalence. That is, I don't think the Holy Spirit was playing a joke on the Church leaders when it inspired them to set up such institutions: They think they want a little learning, I'll show them how much trouble an educational institution can be.

The Lord told Oliver Cowdery that John's phrase about the Word being God was no metaphor, that to receive the Word he must study the Word, get the Word for himself (D&C 9:7-9). Establishing schools that encourage people to get the Word for themselves, that teach them how to do it, acts as a check on the tendency of institutions (even benign or divinely appointed ones) to follow along without thought, supposing that the Word will be given to them.

Even those annoying anti-intellectual statements that sometimes issue forth from the leaders of the Church can be seen as part of a system of balances. As Eric Hoffer never tired of reminding us, a little anti-intellectualism can be a mighty healthy antidote to a poisoning of the old Pireian waterhole.<sup>28</sup>

I think these oppositional balances even act in vague statements about the dangers of symposia where sensitive things are discussed. My sister Krista says this kind of vague language is the hallmark of

thought control, of an oppressive institution trying to control its members by controlling the information they receive, just as an oppressive spouse or parent may seek to control spouse or children through vague references to the other person's (vaguely) guilty actions.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the vagueness of the statement is more a way of protecting the agency of the people involved in symposia—of letting the participants decide whether they're participating in discussions of sensitive matters or not (just as the temple recommend interview is designed to let the person seeking the recommend decide if she or he is worthy of it).

If I might refer back to another sermon I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the Lord's insistence in the Sermon on the Mount that the same action can be either good or evil, depending on the motive behind it, suggests that we are free to interpret the actions of others but should be prepared to give an account of our interpretations, recognizing that our perceptions (especially our negative ones) may be distorted by the giant roof-beam butted up against our eyeballs.<sup>30</sup>

Now, having said all this about counterbalancing oppositions, I want to close by hazarding an observation. Considering Eagleton's assertion that a teacher aesthetic is politically liberal because it focuses attention on the text itself and away from its relation to the larger world, it is worth mentioning that whatever value terms like *liberal* and *conservative* may have in reference to the body of Christ, the more liberal arm of that body tends to espouse a politically conservative aesthetic, while the more conservative arm tends to espouse a politically conservative aesthetic. That should give us considerable pause for reflection.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Harlow Soderborg Clark received a B.A. in 1984, M.A. from the University of Washington in 1988, and is currently a freelance writer preparing lexical, grammatical, and syntactical material for translators of scriptures. This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 26 January 1991, at Westminster College of Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup>Lionel Trilling, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," in *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 9; italics mine.

<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Kozol, *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far From Home* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 9.

<sup>4</sup>Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (University of California Press 1976), vii.

<sup>5</sup>Richard J. Cummings, "Some Reflections on the Mormon Identity Crisis," *Sunstone* 4, no. 5-6. (December 1979): 27-32. This was his AML presidential address, 13 October 1979.

<sup>6</sup>Marden J. Clark, "Toward a More perfect Order Within: Being the Confessions of an Unregenerate, But Not Unrepentant, Mistruster of Mormon Literature," in his *Liberating Form: Mormon Essays on Religion and Literature* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992), 148; also published in *Dialogue* (Winter 1983) and *Proceedings of the Association for Mormon Letters*, 1979-82.

<sup>7</sup>Barber, "The Mormon Woman as Writer," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23 (Fall 1990): 114.

<sup>8</sup>Peterson "A Mormon and the Wilderness: The Saga of the Savages," *Sunstone* 10 (May 1985): 68. See also his title story in *The Canyons of Grace* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982): 109: "Her father and mother were amazingly alike: reverent in the extreme, scrupulous in keeping the commandments, and doubtful of their salvation."

<sup>10</sup>As an example, I offer the following parable:

#### Feed for A Lifetime

There was a man who lived alone in the woods, by a pond and a barn and a hundred acres. His desire was to simplify his life, live sufficient unto himself. Every morning he would push his nose into his barn, 75' x 40' (for he was a man of order and knew the dimensions of his habitations and the bounds thereof), and smell the aroma. Now he was a practical man who recognized the occasional need for money, and to this end he rose worms to sell to farmers and gardeners to enrich their soil and to fishermen who came by. He felt wondrous virtue in helping the fishermen, for his favorite saying was, "Give me a fish, I eat for a day. Teach me to fish, I eat for a lifetime."

One day a gaunt man in tatters came out of the woods. "Please sir, I am famishing. May I have of that food you hold in your hand?"

"Do ye know how to fish?" the man said. "I catch my food daily fresh from this pond."

The gaunt man said he did not know how to fish, upon which his host took him to the barn, got him a pole and worms and set him down on the banks of the pond. "There's fish aplenty in these waters. This is how you cast your line, and this is how you reel them in. Learn to fish, you will eat for a lifetime."

Sure enough the gaunt man soon hooked a fish, a large one, and strong, and in the struggle to get the fish out he fell into the water and drowned.

His host returned soon thereafter, and while he mourned to see his pupil drowned, he was a practical man who recognized the necessity of death. Not wanting to waste anything, he buried the gaunt man in the barn, beneath the worm beds, where he would be of some use to other fishermen.

While it is not obvious that this is a Mormon story, anyone who has sat through a seminary teacher's railings against people on welfare and the ungodliness of welfare, while having a family

member on welfare, will recognize how deeply this story draws upon and would be impossible without, a Mormon adolescence of the 1970s. It was almost impossible even *with* all that Mormon adolescence behind me. The parable took ten or twelve years to think up and another two to write down.

<sup>11</sup>Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 7 vols., 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950 printing), 6:57; see also 5:215 (1949): "The [sectarians] were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members of the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time."

<sup>12</sup>See Thirteenth Article of Faith.

<sup>13</sup>Eagleton counters the reluctance many Marxists feel about evaluating works, and thereby creating hierarchies of value, by noting that surely a materialist criticism has something to say about the distinction between a work that has a great deal of energy and one that simply lies around flaccid on the page. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary theory* (London: NLB, 1976), 162. The problem of literary value is related to the problem of standards of usage and correctness—"good grammar" our elementary schoolteachers called it—and its stock is low on the literary stock exchange for the same reason: to talk about standards and value judgements is to suggest that some people's judgements or standards are not as good as other peoples' and is therefore undemocratic.

<sup>14</sup>Evans, "Unfinished Sestina for the Secretary of War," *Dialogue* 17 (Winter 1984): 117.

<sup>15</sup>Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, Eng.: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

<sup>16</sup>My brother Dennis points out to me that the man who did win ran on an even more conservative ticket.

<sup>17</sup>Consider how many of the leading American New Critics were white Southern Christian men.

<sup>18</sup>Trilling, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," 18. I've become more and more intrigued in the last few years with the idea that the outpouring of the Spirit that attended (for example) the dedication of the Kirtland Temple was not simply for the benefit of the neighbors but was poured out upon the whole world, with lasting effects both beneficial and destructive. We usually think of it as a glorious, lightfilled event but there was, I believe, a dark destructiveness to it as well. Similarly, there was a dark, destructive power to the Savior's resurrection exemplified in his standing in the sky above Zarahemla proclaiming himself the destroyer of fifteen cities and the inhabitants thereof.

The image we have of the gospel as a stone rolling through the earth is an image of destruction. The purpose of that stone is to fill the earth, destroying all kingdoms. Typologically, this is the white-hot stone in Revelation 2:17 that turns the earth into a sea of glass, naming it anew. Perhaps the destroying/creating power implicit in renaming accounts for some of the de- and con-structive power of modern literature, art, science, philosophy and politics.

Though we often think of darkness and destruction as threatening, I am quite charmed by Robert Bly's essay "I Came Naked Out of the Mother," where he talks about the mother cultures that preceded all father cultures. He notes that death, destruction, and darkness are among the characteristics sacred to the Mothers. (In his *Sleepers Joining Hands* [New York, Harper & Row, 1973], 29-50.) Given the persistent Latter-day Saint idea of a Heavenly Mother, this is most intriguing. Many of the things Bly mentions as sacred to the Great Mother recur as images in early Mormon history. His comment that the Mother loves womb-shaped creatures such as turtles (p. 32) calls to mind the turtle-backed Hill Cumorah out of whose stone shell Joseph Smith takes the golden plates (a father image, the father being delivered out of the mother just as Eve is the mother even of Adam), and its fabled womb full of records.

<sup>19</sup>Though I can say I've made answers similar to that on tests, and they were accepted, at least while I was an undergraduate—as the eccentric (but witty) answers of a witty (but very eccentric) student.

<sup>20</sup>Every time I read this last chapter of *Criticism and Ideology*, I'm struck by the near-reverence Eagleton has for Trotsky. He talks about him in the same way Latter-day Saints talk about Joseph Smith: that is, in telling of Trotsky, Eagleton is telling the origin-story of Marxist criticism.

<sup>21</sup>I mentioned this discovery to Altieri, and he said, "Oh, sure," as if this were the most obvious fact in the world. "Marx and Engels built on the Judeo-Christian paradigm." Maybe it is the most ordinary discovery in the world. In reading Len Deighton's *London Match* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) a few years later, I came across a British and Soviet spy discussing precisely this thing. (Or perhaps the power of narrative allowed Deighton to discern something rather unusual.)

<sup>22</sup>I am well aware it is not always prudent, desirable, safe, or honest to reveal one's motives for speaking, not always possible to know what those motives are, and not always dishonest not to reveal the source of our words.

<sup>23</sup>"The Loss of the Creature," in Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1975), 46-63.

<sup>24</sup>Eugene England, "On Fidelity, Polygamy, and Celestial Marriage," *Dialogue* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 152.

<sup>25</sup>People have sometimes said, in talking about why literature deals so much with evil and depravity, that the devil must be powerfully appealing to have been able to draw away a third of the host of heaven: our literature ought to reflect this. This seems an odd argument given Horace's precept that literature is for instruction and delight. Are we saying that our instruction and delight are in the ways of evil? I wish someone would justify the writing and teaching of powerful literature about good and good people by saying "Righteousness must be a powerfully appealing force. After all, given full freedom to choose, a full 2/3 of the host of heaven (a quorum) chose righteousness."

<sup>26</sup>See Harlow, S. Clark, "The Children of Ammon," paper delivered at the Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake, 1989. Copy in Sunstone Collection, Special Collections, Marriott Library, Uni-

versity of Utah. I wonder how much we are influenced by the portraits of intractable Laman and Lemuel. One of the benefits of reading all the way to the end of the Book of Mormon is a portrait of the evil Koriath (Ether 7) who repents when his brother Shule stops fighting him and preaches the gospel to him. The chapter also contains another instance of evil being stopped only when the king stops trying to wipe it out with force and gives the prophets free rein.

<sup>27</sup>Poll, "What the Church Means to People Like Me," *Dialogue* 2 (Winter 1967), 107-17; "Liahona and Iron Rod Revisited" *Dialogue* 16 (Summer 1983): 69-78.

<sup>28</sup>Those who have read much of Hoffer will recognize my words as too high falutin' for him. I use them only to suggest his lack of reverence towards intellectual pretensions. Such pretensions are dangerous because they allow intellectuals to grab power. Intellectuals are dangerous, not because they think, but because their thoughts are of power. See Hoffer, *On the Water Front: A Journal, June 1958-May 1959* (New York: Harper & Row 1969), esp. "Working and Thinking."

<sup>29</sup>Before he murders Desdemona, Othello tells her she is guilty but refuses to tell her of what or let her pray or confess and thus save her soul. I wonder why I can't find anyone besides myself who has tried to work out an interpretation of Othello as an abusive husband, consumed with a desire not only to murder but to damn his wife. Is there something about our aesthetic that tells us that is a shallow interpretation of the play? Surely Shakespeare couldn't have been writing about *domestic violence*! Surely his subject matter is much more lofty than that. Why, those benighted people back then took wife-beating for granted and wouldn't recognize it as abuse, much less write a play protesting it.

<sup>30</sup>I mourn when I hear of people getting in trouble for participating in a symposium. I trust there will arise counterbalances to whatever misuses of ecclesiastical power occur. I take some comfort in a story a friend told me about a man who did some research about the temple ceremony and masonry in Nauvoo and sent (purely as a courtesy) a copy of his research to a general authority whose ancestor was mentioned. He was a bit surprised to receive a letter from President Kimball praising his research, but it came in handy when a man "from the Brethren" showed up on his doorstep. I mentioned this to a friend who had written a controversial book and was surprised when he said, "Yes, I have my letter from President Kimball, too."

# In the Territory of Irony

Harlow Soderborg Clark<sup>1</sup>

THE TERRITORY OF IRONY is a large one, and this tour will of necessity be whirlwind, though I won't pretend to be the voice speaking out of the whirlwind. I'll start with a story Jim Faulconer, currently chair of the Philosophy Department at BYU, told one day in class several years ago. When he was in graduate school at Penn State he got to talking one day with two friends, one a devout Catholic, the other an atheist. The conversation eventually turned to Latter-day Saint beliefs, and to exaltation, the idea of becoming gods and goddesses. The Catholic said, "If you said something like that in one of your church meetings you would be excommunicated," to which Faulconer replied, "Wanna bet?" After a long discussion, the Catholic finally said, "Well, it's clear to me that Mormons aren't Christians at all, but atheists who happen to believe in the perfectibility of man." To which Faulconer replied, nodding his head, "Sounds good to me." "I'm not sure," he told our class, "how well my atheist friend liked being lumped with the Mormons, though."<sup>2</sup>

This insight—that atheism is largely a matter of how you define religion, or how you define your beliefs in relation to the prevailing religious beliefs of your culture—is not new. I think I first considered it on my mission. I was thumbing through a ten-year-old *Improvement Era* and the name of a town not far from me, somewhere I'd been a few days before, caught my eye. Elder Boyd K. Packer was referring to the Woodstock concert and how it was primarily a spiritual gathering; the people gathered might think the purpose was rebellion, or some other thing, but what they wanted was Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Since then, I have come across this same insight about the relationship of atheism to religion in many

LDS sources. I want to extend this insight by suggesting that whether someone considers a thing to be religious in character depends much on whether she or he defines religion in terms that are largely ironic or largely metaphorical.

To introduce the possibilities of defining religion by figures of speech, I cite Marden Clark's account of his summer with the first session of the School of Criticism and Theory. He told of Hayden White,

*an all-American young historian who had despaired of getting at the "real truth" of history because all history is encoded in language and language is notoriously slippery. So White had gone on to write meta-history, or history of history, in which he analyzed the great works of Western world history in structural patterns determined by the particular poetic trope governing the author's encoding of history, which he saw as moving chronologically from metaphor to synecdoche to metonymy to irony. Hence a historian among all those critics and theorists.<sup>4</sup>*

Though I have not yet read *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), that movement of tropes "from metaphor to synecdoche to metonymy to irony" is useful. The first chapter of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code* suggests that, as language develops, it moves generally from metaphor to synecdoche to metonymy.<sup>5</sup> I read Harold Bloom as celebrating irony as perhaps the supreme achievement of language: "from J to K."<sup>6</sup> K we all know as the man named Samsa who suffered the great trial of turning into a bedbug. J is his literary ancestor, so named by the nineteenth-century German scholar Julius

Wellhausen, who posited an author for each of several literary styles he and others had noticed in the Torah. The author who referred to the deity as Jahweh or Jehovah he called the Jahwist, J for short.

*The Book of J* is poet David Rosenberg's translation of those portions of the Torah generally ascribed to J—introduction and interpretation by Harold Bloom.<sup>7</sup> Judging from the reviews you would think that the most remarkable (certainly the most remarked on) thing about the book is that, whereas Wellhausen posited a letter of the alphabet as author, Bloom posits a woman. To my mind much more startling and much more significant, is his insistence that this erudite, sophisticated woman of Rehoboam's court from whose stories descend Judaism, Christianity, and Islam could not in any sense be called a religious author. (If I were a semiotician talking about significances I might wonder aloud here at what it signifies about people who write and read book reviews that the only person I've read who takes issue with this assertion, Lavina Fielding Anderson, is a woman who says that her prayers are often "answered by a distinctively sarcastic personage whom I've come to regard as a kind of guardian angel."<sup>8</sup> Anderson insists that, her love of literature notwithstanding, religious belief, and especially not her own, is not primarily a literary response—does not come in response to literature, even the literature of a supremely erudite woman.<sup>9</sup>

I'm not sure what Bloom means by his assertion, but I think it has to do with J's abundant use of irony. Irony is not, Bloom says, sarcasm, or saying one thing while meaning the opposite, but a vast incommensurateness.<sup>10</sup> "What happens to representation when altogether incommensurate realities juxtapose and clash?" (25) He does not mean only situations like,

*Yahweh attempt[ing] to murder Moses, . . . God sit[ting] under the Terebinth trees at Mamre . . . devour[ing] roast calf and curds. . . . a Supreme Being who goes nearly berserk at Sinai and warns that he may break forth against the crowds, who clearly fill him with distaste. (12)*

He also means situations like "Abram haggling with Yahweh," or Jacob wrestling an "unnamed one among the Elohim to a standstill." "Or far more starkly," he asks,

*how can we find it persuasive that the rough hunter Esau should barter his birthright for that celebrated mess of pottage? The catalog could go on very extensively but would center finally upon the representation of Yahweh as at once human-all-to-human, even childlike, even childish, and yet Yahweh and none other, which is to say, wholly incommensurate, even with himself. (26)*

Note how many of Bloom's examples of the incommensurate involve Yahweh having a body, a body which is the shape and pattern for our own. *Theomorphic* is the term Bloom uses to describe J's humans. But if theomorphic means humans having the form of God, to the Judeo-Christian tradition it also means denying him the power thereof. Though Bloom claims not to be a believer, neither does he question the idea that God is formless, or at least that to believe in God is to believe in a formless being. Bloom is clearly not comfortable with the idea that a woman possessing literary gifts comparable to Homer's, Dante's, Shakespeare's (47-48) could take seriously the idea that there is a God whose body is the pattern for our own. She is far too sophisticated, he says, to naively believe the stories she's telling. In fact, he says, whatever religious beliefs J had are not only not reflected in her work, but are lost to us. She and her people practiced a form of Judaism that is irretrievably lost to us. So I ask: Is that form of Judaism irretrievably lost to us because it was practiced by people who believed in a God with a body of flesh and bone as tangible as our own—a belief eventually rendered (as one renders one's dead sacred cows) metaphorical, synecdochic, metonymic, and ironic because others, and perhaps the believers themselves, were uncomfortable with the ironies implicit in it?

Bloom says that "the long sad practice of censoring J began" almost immediately, perhaps within a half-century of her writing (22). To someone who grew up believing Joseph Smith's teaching that the Bible was deliberately altered by people whose de-

signs were at odds with biblical teachings, that statement has a depth of resonance Bloom might not think possible for a religious person. But why would the idea that the Bible has been altered seem like one that wouldn't be held by a person professing belief in the Bible's inspiration?

Bloom describes J's humans as theomorphic. Northrop Frye's comment on the dust jacket observes: "One of the major problems in Western culture [is] the fact that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is not a theological god at all but an intensely human character." The difference between the statement about J and the statement about her god represents the territory of irony, from whence issues the word and burden of the Lord.

Now if the territory of irony seems an unlikely place for religious faith to blossom—a sort of saline desert place where one could confidently bet a thousand dollars that no seed of planted faith could yield a bushel—let me suggest some ironic moments in the Book of Mormon. The book opens with an irony where words spoken produce a result vastly incommensurate to the words. Nephi, a rather self-righteous adolescent, every bit the obnoxious younger brother his ancestor Joseph was, volunteers, "I will go and do the thing which the Lord hath commanded," rebuking his older brothers during a family council, "for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Ne. 3:7). The next thing he hears from the Lord is the Spirit commanding him to kill an unconscious man who can offer him no harm. The irony is heightened by the fact that, for whatever reason, perhaps to admire its fine workmanship, or to disarm Laban, Nephi has already drawn Laban's sword.

The second is the story of the children of Ammon, in which a people make a vow of love never to take up arms, keep that vow almost to extinction, at which point the Lord tells Ammon that it is not his wish to have these people perish, so they send their sons (who never took the vow) off to war.<sup>11</sup>

The third is an irony fully worthy of J at her most ironic: The Prince of Peace, resurrected Savior of the world, risen with healing in his wings above the skies of Zarahemla, proclaims: "Behold, that great city Zarahemla have I burned with fire, and the inhabitants thereof" (3 Ne. 9:3), and then city by city catalogues the destruction of fifteen cities and their inhabitants. Even more ironic, this grand destruction is followed by a ministry of such love that its memory shapes and inspires their society for the next two hundred years and (many Latter-day Saints believe) lays the foundation for their descendants' destruction and enslavement by the conquistadores. The ironies of this situation are enough to make one anti-Mormon book I chanced across call the Book of Mormon blasphemous because it makes the Savior into a murderer.

From the territory of irony, we've crossed over into the territory of blasphemy. Was J censored, revised, mutilated because someone considered her writings blasphemous? Or, to rephrase that question, if a person has a genuine experience of God's presence, is that experience likely to seem blasphemous when related to someone else? Is there something blasphemous in all religious experience, or in telling it to other people?<sup>12</sup> (Is that why Emily Dickinson advised us to stand slantwise, like this, when telling the truth?) Is this not the carpenter's son? the people of Nazareth asked when Jesus read a Messianic prophecy in synagogue and for commentary proclaimed himself the fulfillment of it? (Luke 4:16-32). Is not this the atheist's son? a minister said of young Joseph Smith. Is not this the son of the man who refuses to join any church?<sup>13</sup> Why would God appear to you? Especially face to face? The theologian is there to check the wild extravagances of the believer. For if the believer feels the call to "live a holy race and worship Jesus face to face in Adam-Ondi-Ahman,"<sup>14</sup> the theologian has been to college and received training in the art of protecting God's reputation.<sup>15</sup> Seminary does more than Housman can to unjustly God's ways to man.

Besides having insufficient respect for God's reputation, there is another component to blasphemy that brings it close to the territory of irony

and that may explain why a woman writing stories about an embodied god might be thought irreligious, even blasphemous: that is, blasphemy also involves a lack of proper respect for the power of God. Think for a minute about the problem of suffering. As Marden Clark told us in class one day, in philosophical terms it's usually stated something like this: There is suffering in the world, especially the suffering of innocent people. Three possibilities exist: There is no being powerful enough to prevent such suffering; there is a being with such power, but he wants innocent people to suffer—in which case God is evil and not worthy of our worship; or, God does not want innocent people to suffer but can't prevent or stop it—in which case God is powerless, and not worthy of our worship. Now, after several years of carrying that definition around in the back of my mind, trying to figure out what it was that seemed so skewed about it, it occurred to me one day to ask, When we say that if God doesn't have the power to stop suffering then he's not worthy of our worship, aren't we saying that we worship power? that only power is worthy of our worship?

That's precisely why the concept of an embodied God offends—blasphemes—against Judeo-Christian theology: it suggests a limitation on God. To refer back to Northrop Frye's dust jacket comment, an embodied god, any embodied god, is not a theological god. Too, if we start to wonder whether God experiences his body the same way we do ours, or what that heavenly restroom where everyone's bowels are moved with compassion is like, we find ourselves in the territory of irony, and it's an uncomfortable place to be. If we are not comfortable thinking of our parents having sex, how much less comfortable is it to think of our heavenly parents engaged in the same activity?

Perhaps a writer aware of these things, who nonetheless believes in an embodied God who participates bodily, partly, and passionately in human life, cannot help but be ironic, cannot represent God honestly without the irony of vast incommensurates.

This raises an intriguing question. Suppose your writing exhibits certain qualities of intelligence and wit highly prized in a larger surrounding culture,

but your subject matter goes against the grain of that culture. How will the larger culture react? Will it recognize that you hold those beliefs, and perhaps say, as some of C. S. Lewis's colleagues did, that you'd be a great scholar if you could just shake your religious beliefs? Will the larger culture acknowledge your viewpoint, and say, as Truman Madsen said of B. H. Roberts, that his exposition of Book of Mormon "difficulties" was purely rhetorical, made for purposes of discussion, and not as a statement of his personal beliefs about the inspiration or authenticity of the Book of Mormon (which may be an accurate observation)?<sup>16</sup> Or will you have the experience, as Levi Peterson did, of having a reviewer term the stories in *Canyons of Grace* a thunderous rejection of God?<sup>17</sup> This is quite appropriate since Frank Windham in Peterson's *The Backslider* does indeed feel himself a sinner in the hands of a vengeful, hateful God.

I suggest that a religious writer, one who cares to wrestle till dawn with "an unnamed one among the Elohim" may of necessity feel both awe and irony for her or his subject matter, her or his task. In this respect, John Keats is a much better travel guide to the territory of irony than Harold Bloom. Of the inhabitants of the territory of irony, Keats said that they are "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable grasping after fact and reason."<sup>18</sup> He called this characteristic negative capability. As opposed to positive capability, it does not posit, assert, or thrust itself after fact and reason, rather it blossoms in the negative space so highly prized by poets and artists.

If for some people such a coexistence of uncertainties and mysteries as is implied by supreme intelligence and supremely naive (as they suppose) beliefs about the Supreme Being seems highly unlikely, perhaps such a coexistence is simply the most radical of J's radical incommensurates.

As both a scholar and artist I have developed an increasing conviction that it is a mistake to divorce literary criticism and theory from the creation of literature. Like all divorces this one has profound political overtones—that is, it affects the way people live and make their livelihood. I'm indebted to

Stanley Fish for this insight. At a conference on rhetoric at the University of Washington ca. 1986-87 he told the English Department's graduate students that the way a department treats its graduate students, especially in matters of pay and class load, is a very political thing, because it affects the way people are able to live. This can also be seen by the war between critics and writers in many departments and by the way many departments consider their MFA a degree inferior to their M.A. Donald Hall explores some of the reasons for this. Picking up on Roman Jakobson's comment that he wouldn't hire Vladimir Nabokov because, while he had nothing against elephants, he wouldn't hire one to teach zoology, Hall says that creative writing teachers are the zoo animals of English departments.<sup>19</sup> And I take it that children's writers are the zoo animals of creative writing programs. I was standing in the English Department graduate office at the University of Washington one day when one of the creative writing professors walked in. The secretary mentioned that one of the students who had just been accepted to the program had published a children's book (in hardback, illustrated with photographs—no mean feat, that). His response, utterly without irony, was, "Well, we don't want people like that in our department, only serious writers."

I try whenever I can to combine theory and practice, so I'm going to read you a short tale. It was not written for this paper—it was written by a character in the unpublished story in which I thought I coined the term *theomorphic*, though it is not a part of that story.<sup>20</sup>

## The Fatherly Heaven and the Motherly Earth

It was not always so that the Fatherly Heaven and the Motherly

Earth were separated. At one time she was in him, and he in her, and we in them, all of us. I do not understand it either, but that is how they rolled through vast time and space springing off children, joyous, numerous as stars.

Something happened. I do not know. A blowup? Big as the universe? Perhaps the Fatherly Heaven tired of conjugal duties, flung the Motherly Earth away. Perhaps she ran from the demands, the demands, the ever rolling and unrolling demands. Word has it one third of the bright stars rebelled against the Fatherly Heaven, drew themselves away from the Motherly Earth. Perhaps her grief was keen enough to cut her away, knock her out of orbit—keen enough even now sometimes to shake her, drench her with winds and rain, ashes, smoke, fire.

Perhaps the waters and winds and ashes, the tongues of flame come from their fighting, always and always, over the children. The children always get the worst.

And she, she got the children.

Or rather, she had the matter to make them flesh and blood to dwell in.

The children went to live with their mother.

They longed to visit their father. That meant leaving their flesh and blood. No retrieving. No fullness of joy without flesh to contain it and bone to bear it up.

Deadlocked. Thousands of years of children returning to visit their father. Thousands of years yearning for their mother.

The Fatherly Heaven wants the bodies. Sent down His son, Their son, to bring them back, reason with the Motherly Earth, ransom the bodies, pull them from their dirt womb.

They killed him.

So they buried him in a stone womb. And darkness. Sealed with a stone. Who knows but what the Motherly Earth, holding her son crossways of her lap could only hold him a short while. She had fought and pleaded, begged for him, but not to hold him cold in a cave. Grief trembled, shook cities into the sea. That white stone she tore out of the mountain—without hands! Swore it should fill the whole of her earth, destroying.

And then—she gave up the body. All bodies.

She still shakes, winds and rain, ashes, smoke, fire—cities and children and crops destroyed. It is said the son, both mourned and grieved for, will



wipe the tears of the parents and with those tears cleanse the Motherly Heaven, and the Fatherly Earth and lead them back into one another, and us in them as well. And they in us. I do not understand this mystery. But that is how this tale has come down to me.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Harlow Soderborg Clark received a B.A. in 1984, M.A. from the University of Washington in 1988, and is currently a freelance writer preparing lexical, grammatical, and syntactical material for translators of scriptures. This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 25 January 1992, at Westminster College of Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup>I mentioned to Faulconer once Nietzsche's reputation as a rabid anti-Christ. He replied that he personally didn't have much use for the theological conceptions of God that Nietzsche was rejecting, that it was an idea Nietzsche was rejecting, not a person, and perhaps if he'd had better ideas to work with about the personalities of God and Christ (Kierkegaard's ideas, for example), Nietzsche would have felt differently.

See also, Wilfred DeCoo, "Mormonism in a Catholic Region: A Contribution to the Social Psychology of LDS Converts," *BYU Studies* 24 (Winter 1984): 1, 61-76. While many American Mormons are wary of socialism, associating it with atheism, DeCoo says that European Saints rather acknowledge their gratitude to it for breaking the hold of traditional churches in Europe, thus making room for the gospel to flourish. This sentiment was echoed by a Canadian socialist I met at the Sunstone Symposium in Seattle, 1989.

<sup>3</sup>Boyd K. Packer, "The Other Side of the Ship," *Improvement Era*, December 1969, 57-59. See also R. Val Johnson, "Sage's Song," *Ensign*, August 1989, 30-35, and Richard L. Dunn, "Would They Accept a Hippie?" *Ensign*, March 1990, 66-67.

<sup>4</sup>Marden J. Clark, "Text on T E X T," 4-5, address to the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association; photocopy of typescript in my possession. He also gave this address to the BYU English Department in somewhat different form and repeated much of the information in 1982 as an address to the Association for Mormon Letters, "Toward a More Perfect Order Within: Being the Confessions of an Unregenerate But Not Unrepentant Mistruster or Mormon Literature." Printed in his *Liberating Form: Mormon Essays on Religion and Literature* (Salt Lake City, Aspen Books, 1992).

<sup>5</sup>*The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1982).

<sup>6</sup>Harold Bloom, ed., *Genesis: Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 1.

<sup>7</sup>David Rosenberg, trans., *The Book of J*, interpreted by Harold Bloom (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 31. Further quotations from this work are cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>8</sup>Lavina Fielding Anderson, "On Being Happy: An Exercise in Spiritual Autobiography," *Exponent II* 9 (Fall 1982), 1-3. Quoted in, Eugene England, "We Need to Liberate Mormon Men," *Dialogues with Myself* (Midvale, Utah: Orion Books, 1984), 163.

<sup>9</sup>Lavina Fielding Anderson, "Delusion as an Exceedingly Fine Art," review of Franklin Fisher's novel *Bones*, *Dialogue* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 148.

<sup>10</sup>*The Book of J*, 25. *Incommensurate* is a good summary of Hans-Georg Gadamer's comment that tragedy doesn't attest to the moral orderliness of the universe but to the fact that the consequences of a single guilty act are enormously out of proportion to the act itself. *Truth and Method* (New York: Crosswinds, 1986). In his version of *The Trojan Women* Sartre said the same thing about Euripides that Bloom has said about J: that the religious beliefs of that time are unrecoverable to us, and, consequently, Euripides and J didn't hold the same beliefs that we don't hold. It is not the purpose of satire to be fair, but to point out things that are invisible in a nonsatirical approach; and what is invisible in a nonironic reading of Bloom and Sartre is that, once you've said a people's beliefs or forms of worship are unrecoverable, you can't say what they didn't believe. Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, adapted by Jean-Paul Sartre, translated by Ronald Duncan (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

<sup>11</sup>See Harlow Soderborg Clark, "The Children of Ammon," paper delivered at the Sunstone Theological Symposium, Salt Lake, August 1989.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Don and Brennan Kingsland's *Mormons Are Christians, Too!* (Big Bear City, Calif.: Platen Publications, 1986). Before converting to Mormonism, Don had been part of a healing ministry and Brennan "a practicing psychic. . . . We were a little nervous about what the Church would have to say about some of the spiritual experiences we had after we became members. What if we were to be excommunicated?" (21) Shortly before they were to go to the temple Don awoke in great pain (Satan-induced, he felt) and asked Brennan to lay hands on him. Angels came to relieve Don's pain, show her the source of the infection, and combined spiritual energy with hers to heal the infection. They mentioned this incident to their bishop, who accepted not only this experience but also their description of casting out evil from a suicidally depressed young man (28-29). Their fears of excommunication were tied to the question of "how the Church felt about the kinds of manifestations we had described" (30).

<sup>13</sup>Marvin Hill, review of Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, *BYU Studies* 30, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 70-74, suggests that Palmyrans may have considered Joseph Smith, Sr., immoral simply because he didn't come to church.

<sup>14</sup>"This Earth Was Once A Garden Place," no. 49 in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985).

<sup>15</sup>I am reminded of the cartoon that hung for years on my father's office door. A man kneeling in prayer says, "Hello God, It's me, Jesse Helms, Your man in the Senate. What would you do without me?" God replies, "Oh, I'd get by."

<sup>16</sup>Ron Bitton, "B. H. Roberts Book Stirs Controversy," *Sunstone* 10, no. 9, pp. 36-38, reports Truman Madsen and John Welch's attack on Brigham Madsen and Sterling McMurrin after they published Roberts's *Studies in the Book of Mormon*. The attack is in a preliminary report for the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (1985), called, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith in the Book of Mormon?" Madsen and McMurrin replied in an address to the Algje Ballif forum. A transcript of their reply and a copy of the FARMS report are in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>17</sup>John Hale, Review of Levi Peterson, *The Canyons of Grace*, *Western Humanities Review* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 84-86: "Like Hawthorne and Melville, Peterson takes God at His word and, eternal consequences notwithstanding, says *no*. For the characters in his stories, the price of belief—terror, lovelessness, alienation from nature—is simply too high." Hale is apparently referring to Melville's statement: "There is a grand truth about Nathaniel Hawthorne. He says No! in thunder; but the devil himself cannot make him say *yes*." As quoted in Leslie Fiedler, *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler, Vol. 1* (New York: Stein and Day 1971), 276.

Hales review reflects the views of Mormons offended by Peterson's work. Among those who aren't, I note numerous comparisons to Flannery O'Connor—a faithful artist writing bizarre tales. Hale's review raises the question of whether we so deeply believe we deserve good that we will interpret a story about the terrible price God sometimes exacts as a rejection of God.

<sup>18</sup>John Keats, Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December 1817, as quoted in Hazard Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), 474.

<sup>19</sup>Hall, "Poetry and Ambition" in his *Poetry and Ambition: Essays 1982-88* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 15; and in *The Pushcart prize Volume 9: Best of the Small Presses*, edited by Bill Henderson (New York: Pushcart Press, 1984), 329.

<sup>20</sup>The story, "Irreantum," deals with a graduate student who has taken a leave during his divorce. He is almost obsessed with acknowledging his sources and writing numerous, voluminous footnotes. He thinks he may have heard *theomorphic* from Truman Madsen.

# Doubt and the Desert

John Bennion<sup>1</sup>

THE SHEEPROCK MOUNTAINS curve in the shape of a knife from west to south of my home town, Vernon, Utah. Blackrock Mountain is the butt of the handle, the Tintic Peaks the top of the hilt, Main Canyon the blade point. Beyond the range to the west lies deep desert, known in pioneer times as Paiute Hell. "From Lookout Pass," writes Frank Robertson,

*you look out over forbidding deserts of mountains and flats. . . . It is hot as the hinges of hell in summer, cold as the polar regions in winter. In winter, blizzards block the roads; in summer, cloudbursts wash them out.*<sup>2</sup>

Since the beginning of this century my paternal relatives have conducted an affair with that desolate country.

Twice a year since before I was born, the Vernon Bennions drove their cattle westward to winter range at Thanksgiving time, back again at Easter—a four-day trip. As a child, I walked or rode behind the cattle, which scattered through the cedars on Lookout Pass if they were hungry or lined out on the gravel road across the prairie when the lead cows remembered the alfalfa fields on my father's homestead in the desert.

The herd passed through or near eight of my grandfather Glynn's former ranches—Greenjacket, Hill Springs, the Sharp place, the dry farm near Black Rock, the Faust Ranch, the James Ranch on the far side of Lookout Pass, Indian Springs, and finally Riverbed—each of which he took up and lost because of disastrous weather or unfounded trust in bankers and partners. After each loss he moved on, motivated by the mirage of a blossoming desert.

This obsession in my family with exploring westward into the desert for unsettled but fertile land began with the first Bennion in Utah. The Salt Lake City land owned by John and Samuel, brothers who immigrated from Wales, was absorbed by Brigham Young, who, when he discovered that grazing land wouldn't regenerate itself as it had in the East and in England, sent the brothers west across the Jordan in violation of his treaty with the Utes. After their herds of sheep and cattle quickly used up the grazing there, my great-great-grandfather, my namesake, explored and claimed land to the north and south ends of Rush Valley, relative wilderness. In a letter to his first wife's parents in Wales he writes:

*About one year ago I with a few others took a few days journey in a South West direction beyond the settlements in search of better grazing country soon after I moved my sheep cattle & horses out there, I am now well satisfied that it was a move in the right direction, our live stock wintered well, by getting their own living, I now have a flock of 1150 sheep about 70 of cattle and about 20 head of horses.*<sup>3</sup>

Those herds grew until the heavy grass around Vernon was depleted, and then he moved his herds to near Castle Dale, selling all his sheep when that country was used up. He regularly walked a hundred-mile circuit through Rush Valley and back to manage his holdings; he sometimes cruelly used wives and children as a colonizing and laboring force, all in the service of his desire to build a spiritual and economic empire.

For causes of his ambition I look not only to Brigham Young's fervor which made the colonizing instinct into a religion, but also to the class system in Wales. In John's youth he was accused of

poaching on manor lands; he escaped shame and perhaps worse by running away to Liverpool where he joined the Mormon Church. A few decades later in Deseret he was a successful and propertied patriarch, and his lust for land exists in the family down to the fifth generation, my own.

Instead of breeding vast herds, John's son Israel, my great-grandfather, strove to create a position for himself in God's earthly kingdom by creating a utopian Mormon village. He developed land south of Vernon and invited new immigrants to join him, predicting that, if they shared according to the righteous principles of the United Order, God would bless them by increasing yearly precipitation which would consequently affect the flow of the streams. A severe drought drove them from their hovels and destroyed their faith in his prophecy, and they complained that Israel had misled them with his foolish visions. Their complaints caused the authorities in Tooele to remove Israel as the Vernon Ward's representative on the high council. "I have been released from the councils of the mighty," he told his family.<sup>4</sup> Like John Bennion's success, Israel's failure was not simply economic; he felt it as a loss of religious and social status.

Although my grandfather Glynn was more of a wanderer, his dreams were similar to those of his father Israel, his grandfather John, and every other American pioneer who has looked westward for wealth. His specific dream was that he would prove that alfalfa and beef could grow in the most arid country in Utah. His herds of cattle would grow larger than his grandfather's, his property holdings more extensive. One consequence would be that he would grow in stature in the eyes of his Salt Lake relatives who were important in the Church.

One of his pioneering experiments with making the desert blossom was homesteading Indian Springs, which he settled with three of his sons. My father, Colin, who had the same dream of the west desert, describes the move in his autobiography:

*June 21st, 1934—my father, my brothers Owen and George, and I set out on an adventure. We rented a truck and loaded it with \$12 worth of groceries, lumber and fixtures for a cabin, seeds and fruit tree starts, and bedding.*

*We left Salt Lake City in the morning. We traveled over Lookout pass, Government Wash, Simpson Springs, and finally arrived at our destination—a hollow six miles south of Simpson. We got there at 12:00 midnight, having gone 110 miles. . . .*

*We planted a garden before we did anything else. . . . Then we built our cabin. My dad wasn't anything special as a builder, but I thought he was great. The thing I remember best was that he made a latch-string. He said—When you are away, you leave the latch-string out—which means, "Everybody is welcome to this house."*

*Then we started to work on our ditch. Shovels and rakes, work that bent backs and gave us aches. When we got the water down, we dragged a harrow, meant for a horse, by 3 boy and one manpower, after we had planted the 10-acre field in alfalfa. Four days later the little cotyledon came up—then the true leaves. We knew we could grow it. Clean the ditch—fix it where the wild horses came off the hill and trampled rocks into the water—find better places where the water could run—bring down the Coyote water and clean the spring—and above all—spread the life-giving water on the orchard, garden, and field.*

*1934 was the driest year in Utah history. I just remember one rain all summer. I hated the place. I hated the dry earth. At one time we started getting what we called the stomy-gurgle—we'd wake up with a rotten taste in our mouths, then barf for one hour. Dad finally figured it was the water from the ditch, which was running over old sheep bedding grounds.*

*He started carrying two buckets of water every morning from Coyote junction—a mile away. I never really appreciated his efforts for many years.*

*He had planned for this ranch for two years. The year before we came out, he had surveyed the ditch and spring at Indian, and had brought out two bronco work horses and, in April, plowed the ten acres we planted. Then in June we all came out. . . .*

*In August my father walked across the mountain, bringing back the same bronco team, a wagon, and a plow and a few staples to eat. He introduced me to the one-man plow. An acre a day. Thirty acres were put under cultivation and planted. More irrigation, more ditch work, more concern for the growing alfalfa. Many people search for the wonder crop of the west. Search no more. It is alfalfa.<sup>5</sup>*

This discovery, that a water-intensive crop like alfalfa would grow in the desert, must have felt to them like Columbus finding the East. After their first crop, instead of arid wilderness, my father and his father saw a green alfalfa Eden; in their minds romance and economy mingled, strong as testimony.

Once on his Riverbed farm, my father and I labored to shore up a low ditch. We dug clay which stuck to our shovels and boots but not to the ditch bank. With the venom which only an adolescent can produce, I asked my father what possessed him to waste his life on that barren land. He dropped his hands to his sides and wept, partly from disappointment that I would ask such a thick-headed question, partly from the emotion he felt toward the farm. He told me that the soil had the right composition for protein-rich alfalfa and that the underground water was wealth. Agriculture was the foundation for prosperity in any country. We were engaged in an essential endeavor, one ordained by God. Love of land for all of my Bennion ancestors has been economics, social status, religion, and romance intermingled.

Grandfather Glynn worked the James Ranch but lost that place after the harsh winter of 1948-49. As the snow deepened, the cattle climbed onto the carcasses of the first dead; in spring he found pyramids of rotting beef. Soon afterward he discovered that water lay just below the surface of dry river valley west of Indian Springs, and he believed that even better alfalfa crops could be grown there. In 1951, because he had already used up his and his wife's allotted homesteads, he filed for each of his children and most of their spouses, claiming three and a half sections of desert land.

On the cover of the Home section of the *Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 September 1962, Grandfather Glynn sits on his tractor at Riverbed; he wears no hat, a temporary foolishness due to the photographer's request for an unshaded face. His irrigation boots are folded down, the ones he wore constantly as he walked a hundred miles every week back and forth across the fields he irrigated. In the article, my grandfather praises the Homestead Act, which provided

a way for people with average income to realize the dream of getting and holding land. "No rich investor could secure great tracts of land and operate with tenants or hirelings like European lords," he said to the reporter. Ironically, becoming powerful through gaining property was probably one of his motives. As John's grandson he imbibed his thirst for land and animals with the air he breathed and the water he drank; and in the article, he translates the vision into modern terms:

*Pioneer spirit for homesteading, adventure, hard work and realizing one's dreams, regardless of age, was once an important part of our American life. People of today just cannot be convinced that there are thousands of acres of unappropriated land in the great valleys of the West Desert, potentially rich and productive with ample underground water for irrigation.*

*These lands are going to waste because homesteading is generally considered to be for poor people and then only of necessity. True, to make a success of a homestead nowadays requires money, credit, courage, a quality of imagination that can make a mirage actually become a garden of Eden.<sup>6</sup>*

Riverbed was his last farm, the pinnacle of his efforts to make the desert blossom. After talking to my grandfather, the reporter was converted to the vision and returned to Salt Lake to describe Riverbed as Utopia. The article reads,

*Rounding the last mountain point, the valley before me was unbelievable—a rich green spectacle, with rows of bailed [sic] hay stretching into the distance, greenfields of alfalfa, corrals of fine fat livestock, a yard of modern well-kept farm machinery, and ditches flowing with clear water.<sup>7</sup>*

As with his father and grandfather, the motivation for Glynn's drive westward was more than simple economics. His wife, Lucile Cannon Bennion, was from Salt Lake City; and earlier in his life, my grandfather had tried living there. When he first began work there as a journalist and historian, writing for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the *Improve-*

ment Era, and the Church Historian's Office, the growth he evidenced pleased my grandmother. In a letter to my father, she writes:

*Your father has just completed a very excellent article on Brigham Young and Jim Bridger. . . . It really is very, very fine. He is all the time gaining in ability to see, to analyse and to express with conviction the wonderful things he finds in the files of the Historian's Office. I feel too that he has gained this winter a new view of Brigham Young's work which will be helpful to him, to us and to others who read his findings.<sup>8</sup>*

Perhaps her desire was that he grow to be an important man in the Church, like his grandfather John, his father Israel, and his brothers. But she was sensitive enough to see that there was a quality in him which allowed him to escape both the good and evil of such ambition. She writes:

*Your father is not like many men who like to exercise their authority. But he has all the qualities of a leader of the first rank and, if each of us follows his quiet, unassuming leadership we will have much happiness together.<sup>9</sup>*

Unfortunately for her he finally became unable to bear living in the city, primarily because the money paid for writing was not enough to support his family. The men who married the other Cannon sisters—his brother Howard and his brothers-in-law Dave Howell and Ira Sharp—were all becoming millionaires. My uncle Robert Bennion describes his father's discouragement: "Dad wanted to make it big and being a writer and a flunky to the historian was not buying groceries for his family."<sup>10</sup>

My grandfather wanted to build a desert empire and return to Salt Lake a man of status, but he also had trouble writing the kind of history the Church demanded. Church Historian Joseph Fielding Smith possessed the attitude that history is for the purposes of building faith, of necessity positive. My grandfather disagreed. Once he found compromising material in the diary of a prominent Church leader and pointed it out to another historian. The next day the diary was missing those pages;

he blamed Joseph Fielding Smith. With authority pushing in this manner and with the desert pulling, Grandfather Glynn soon returned to the country of his childhood.

As his dreams took him farther and farther west, away from the moist air, the trees, people, and conveniences Grandmother Lucile knew, she didn't follow him. In another letter to my father, she writes that his Grandpa Israel had had his eightieth birthday:

*Your father was of course at the ranch, where he has been for nearly 5 weeks. The children too had all gone out Saturday afternoon. I stayed in because of the extreme heat and dust. No rain for nearly a month.<sup>11</sup>*

When I was a child, she lived at Greenjacket near Vernon; but my grandfather's trips away became lengthier, and finally she moved back to Salt Lake, where dust didn't aggravate her hayfever and where she could more easily further her career as a painter of pictorial maps. According to my Uncle Robert, she hoped that her work would help her husband:

*The maps were to make a pile of money for Dad so he could get his pipeline built, or get whatever he wanted so he could be a cattle baron, so that he could be comfortable in the courts of the genteels (or should I say, gentiles?).<sup>12</sup>*

For much of their marriage, my grandparents were separate, she a daughter of the city, one of the faithful, he a son of the desert, a doubter after learning history which was incompatible with his belief.

Following her death he recorded his disturbance of soul concerning the conditions which separated them:

*The dreadful agony is over. For her there is now the rest and peace and joyous reunions of Beulah Land. For me there is self-recrimination and regret—and an overpowering aloneness I've never before experienced.*

*I should have tried harder to make a living in her natural environment, the city. But I wasn't trained for it, hated it, couldn't cope with it. I wanted*

*to be hauling wheat to the railroad with a four-horse outfit, or working cows in the aspens and chokecherries. There just isn't anything like the thrill of seeing a stretch of barren land become a beautiful green field.*

*And all the while I was far away pursuing one chimerical venture after another, she was always near. At Indian Springs or some other outlandish place if I got to worrying about things at night and couldn't sleep I'd get up and walk over to Six Mile and back, occasionally scaring myself wide awake by hearing myself talking to her.*

*But now if I speak to her, she doesn't hear me anymore. So I've been re-reading her letters. She was a most faithful letter writer. To me they are the sweetest love letters a man ever got. Not just because they are tender and kind. She never gave up scolding, arguing, cajoling, pleading, trying her darndest to convince me that some of the worrisome items I encountered during the six years I spent in the Church Historians Office were not important.<sup>13</sup>*

But she had been unable to restore him to a conventional faith, the respect of his city relatives, or her own companionship.

Like my Grandfather Glynn, my father was influenced by opposing desires: he wanted the status and friendship offered by conventional community as well as the freedom and economic opportunity of the desert. He writes:

*My boyhood was a mixed experience—Cannon city associations in Salt Lake; Bennion ranch days near Vernon. I worked for Grandfather [George M.] Cannon doing lawn and shade tree work in Forest Dale. From him I gained a love of trees. I worked with the Bennions in the summers, learning the business of vegetable gardens, range cattle, horses, and haying. I also absorbed a love for the desert and mountain ranges that is so deep a part of me. Wild animals, insects, reptiles, and birds are so much a part of my being that I guess I can accept the words of Kipling's Jungle Book: "We be brothers, thee and I."<sup>14</sup>*

He also experimented unsuccessfully with living in the city. He tried school at the University of Utah, where he was unhappy and lonely. He served a mission in Texas, and then returned to Fort Worth

for air force navigation school. His assignment was with the 397th Bombardment Squadron. "We patrolled for German and Jap submarines and ship-ping," he wrote. "I loved the swimming and fishing, and hunting in the bush."<sup>15</sup> On his return he tried the University of Utah again and law school in Chicago, neither of which satisfied him. Finally he found his place studying range management in the forestry school at Utah State, where he met my mother, Sergene Benson, a city woman like my grandmother. Summers he returned to Greenjacket and the west desert, building a cow herd of his own in the country of his youth. "Times change," he writes, "but not the desert."

*I enjoyed the farm work there [in Riverbed] and also I thought the setting of mountains and desert w[as] beautiful. One of the sights I loved best was when summer thunderstorms came, they would come as a grey curtain in a diagonal across the south end of Keg Mountain, across our land, and head for Bennion Canyon in the Vernon Mountains. Then the blessed rain would soak our Greenjacket ranch.<sup>16</sup>*

He enjoyed the scenery but again, like his father, the core of his admiration was for the productive forces of the desert—moisture in the form of rain or well-water, alfalfa roots and leaves, land made arable.

This back and forth movement between two worlds had a liberalizing and a confusing effect on my father, as it did on my grandfather. He had a fierce devotion to both city and country family; his motto was "Vive la raza," meaning his Sharp, Cannon, Morris, and especially his Bennion relations. He worked hard for the community in Vernon as mayor, as Boy Scout and Explorer leader for a decade or more, and as teacher of countless classes in the Church. He understood community and the necessity of hierarchy, but at the same time he had an extreme sensitivity to individual independence; he was one of the most tolerant people I have known.

In Panama he made himself perfect his high school Spanish by moving back and forth between the Americans and the natives. He told me that

once he was on a bus where some American soldiers sat behind an upper-class Panamanian man and woman. The soldiers were mocking the couple but were so ignorant of Spanish that they couldn't imagine anyone understanding two languages. My father watched the faces of the Panamanians, feeling with them their anger and shame.

As I grew up, he was like a bridge between the Mexican-Americans and the Anglos, the actives and the apostates in Vernon; he tried to be friends with everyone. In addition, another kind of tolerance—desert feminism—was forced on him by biological fact. I was the first and only son, followed by five daughters, so my sisters had to learn to work on the ranch. They taught my father through their competence. In notes for his remarks at my sister Susan's missionary farewell, he writes:

*My girls had to help me on the farm and the cattle range. They trailed cows twice a year out to Riverbed, slept on the ground, and ate dirt behind the herd.*

*They drove tractors, did [meaning castrated and earmarked] the calves at branding, walked miles in the snow—and still managed to look feminine.<sup>17</sup>*

But like my grandfather, the desert in his soul had its down-side. When he was a child he lay in the next room, listening to his parents argue about religion. In addition, he swallowed whole the tension between my grandfather and the more respectable Salt Lake relations, whom my father also loved. His personality became a paradoxical mixture as he inherited my grandmother's desire for faith and my grandfather's impulse to doubt. In postmodern terms he was marginalized, inhabiting the region between community and desert. This confusion, when coupled with his moroseness (he was very sick as a child) and with his biological propensity for depression, helped my father become an alcoholic. Perhaps his despair about his own emotions, his body, his people, and his religion was salved in some way by his habit. I now think of his unhappiness over his own alcoholism as a kind of scapegoat for his deeper despair.

Once when my father, my grandfather, and I returned from Riverbed, my grandfather, quite senile, was rambling on about Brigham Young serving alcoholic beverages to guests in the Lion House. We were on the east slope of Lookout Pass, traveling down toward the lights of Vernon, and my father slammed hard enough on the brakes that the truck, loaded with hay, slid to a stop. He chastised his father for talking to me, an unformed adolescent, about such matters. Then he took me behind the truck and told me that his father had lost his testimony because of research in the Church Historian's Office. I think my father's anger was due to a desire to protect me from the confusion he had felt most of his life. But if anything my intelligent, hybrid ancestry had prepared me to ingest such facts without indigestion of the spirit.

Like my father I am a product of both community and the desert. Dozens of times a year, we crossed Lookout Pass traveling to the desert, returning again. We labored to start the ancient diesel engine which ran the pump, counted the seconds between drips of oil for the spinning shaft, chopped ice and fed cattle during the winter, cleaned ditches in the spring, irrigated and hauled hay during the summer. After a day or week in the desert, we drove back to Vernon. The Lombardy poplars, cottonwoods, Russian olives seemed to breathe moisture, which smelled unbelievably sweet after the drought of the desert. Sunday mornings we sat on wooden benches, with either the breath of the coal furnace on our hands and necks, or with the windows open under the cool trees, while speakers wove their words. In that white, wooden Church house, I began to feel the lift and movement of the Spirit.

In town my sisters and I were under another civilizing influence—that of my mother, who probably more than any other person has taught me the adaptability necessary for moving between worlds. Because of her, despite any confusion of doubt and faith, gregariousness and independence, I've been able to hold my skin together. Like Grandmother



Lucile, my mother was a city woman, but she remained with my moody and driven father all of his life. Of their courtship, my father writes:

*In my senior year I met and fell in love with Sergene Benson, daughter of Serge and Elizabeth Benson, who at that time were living in Silver Springs, Md. The summer before we were engaged I sent Sergene an Indian arrowhead and rattles from a snake. I'm sure her mother was outraged, upset, and mystified; but it must have meant more to her daughter, because the next summer we were married in the Logan Temple.<sup>18</sup>*

She lived with him at Greenjacket and in Vernon, overcoming isolation by turning to books, making friends with the Bennions and Vernonites, fiercely managing the limited resources which farming and teaching give a family, and continually urging us toward the finer things of the world. She has a practical respect for the benefits of property but hasn't been blinded by the romance of my male ancestors. While my grandmother returned to the city, my mother's resilience and flexibility have allowed her to remain in the relative desert of Vernon.

So what is my inheritance? I am also afflicted in my blood with the illusion of wealth in a blossoming desert. I long to regain the small herd of angus cattle I once had and to stand in my own alfalfa field as the mist of irrigation sprinklers surrounds me. I want to build a house at Green Jacket and live there, competent, self-sufficient, unperverted by my own wealth, the moral opposite of urban businessmen. But I love weaving words with people, both writing and talking with a class as we unravel some text, and there is no college at Green Jacket. So I live a suburbanite, a teacher at what some call the Lord's university. Viewed from the perspective of either desert rats or urban Church members my life is an inconstancy—a movement between desert and town, doubt and faith—a pluralism received from my people. And I want all of it: my grandfather's integrity and doubt, my father's sensitivity and tolerance, my grandmother's faith and imagination, my mother's adaptability and culture. The voice which speaks from this confusion will be inconsistent, fragmented, and will explode upward through

the surface of conventionality, through the tendency of many to imagine that all good people are similarly pious. It will be marked by what my father calls a "wry, dry, peculiarly Bennion sense of humor." Bennions, he writes, "all tend to be a bit salty and earthy in our jokes and teasing; shocking to some more delicate souls."<sup>19</sup>

Once my grandfather, senile and bewildered, sat among sophisticated city folk at a Bennion reunion. My aunt, his daughter-in-law, played something from Mozart or Beethoven on the piano. Afterward, when everyone clapped politely, he half stood on his ruined legs and shouted "Bravo, bravo." Many looked at him, disapproving. I only hope I can add my raucous voice to his.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>John Bennion is an assistant professor of English at Brigham Young University, teaching for 1992-93 at BYU-Hawaii. He is the author of *Breeding Leah, and Other Stories* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991). The Bennion men in this essay are, in generational order, Great-great-grandfather John Bennion, Israel Bennion, Glynn Bennion, and Colin Bennion. A shorter version of this essay was presented at the 1991 annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, Westminster College, Salt Lake City, Utah, and was published in *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992).

<sup>2</sup>Frank C. Robertson, "through Paiute hell," in *Hoofbeats of Destiny: the Story of the Pony Express*, edited by Robert West Howard (New York: New American Library, 1960), 99.

<sup>3</sup>Ruth Winder Rogers, *Bennion Family History*, Vol. 4 (n.p.: Bennion Family Association, 1990), 136.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Bennion, conversation, January 1992.

<sup>5</sup>Glynn Colin Bennion, *Autobiography*, manuscript in possession of Barbara Wilson.

<sup>6</sup>*Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 September 1962, 6-7.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* 6.

<sup>8</sup>Lucile Cannon Bennion, Letter to Glynn Colin Bennion, 21 March 1940.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Robert Bennion, interviewed by author January 1992.

<sup>11</sup>Lucile Cannon Bennion, Letter to Glynn Colin Bennion, 5 June 1940.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Bennion, interviewed January 1992.

<sup>13</sup>Glynn Bennion to Bill Hunter, 24 March 1966.

<sup>14</sup>Glynn Colin Bennion, *Autobiography*.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Personal notes of Glynn Colin Bennion in possession of Barbara Wilson.

# Risk and Terror

John S. Harris<sup>1</sup>

*Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who never enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.*

Theodore Roosevelt

WHEN I LAY IN A HOSPITAL very badly injured from the crash of my experimental airplane, some visitor asked me if I thought my injuries were a judgment for my sins. I remember saying no, and I even remember wondering that anyone should be so silly, let alone so tactless as to ask such a question. But I don't remember who asked it, and I don't really want to. The asker and I have some differences in philosophy and theology that are so deep and irreconcilable that it would be difficult for us to continue to be friends if those differences surfaced again.

I presume that the asker sees God watching every act and doling out immediate punishment for every infraction of divine law. Yes, I did violate a law—not a law of God, but of nature, and as my parachutist daughter says: The law of gravity is strictly enforced. That I will accept, along with Newton's laws of motion, the laws of conservation of energy and matter, and the first and second laws of thermodynamics. Those and many other "laws" as they have been postulated by astute observers and interpreters of nature seem to be binding on all mankind. Whether they are binding on God, I do not presume to say. Such laws of nature are not all obvious, and finding out what they are is sufficient purpose for existence.

Mormon theology includes a belief that before earth existence there was a rather Milton-like war in Heaven. At issue was the choice of free agency vs. a Satan-proposed plan that all would be compelled to do right. We are told the free agency side won the war, and as a result human beings came to earth as a stage of development in eternal progression. Even without such a theological background, I suspect I would have been inclined to free agency and choice—with the attendant risks and consequences. That inclination is probably genetic.

I know a good deal about my family history, and I can see that I come from a long line of question askers and risk takers. My first ancestor bearing the family name in America came over with Roger Williams in 1630. He immediately got in trouble in Massachusetts Bay Colony over theological issues. Family tradition says that he was preaching in church and his doctrines were so offensive to the congregation that he was dragged from the pulpit by the hair of his head and thrown in jail. He was later released and accompanied Williams to Providence, a more tolerant colony. He set the pattern for the family. Since that time, no two successive generations of the family have lived in the same place. They have been pioneers on whatever frontier existed in Rhode Island, New York, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Utah, Chihuahua, and Alberta. And for various reasons they were chased out of most of those places. My mother's people went from England to South Africa in the early part of the last century, and came to Utah in the 1850s. Thus, all of my ancestors crossed the plains by wagon or handcart. Risk takers all.

The pilot's equivalent of seeking a new frontier is what is called "expanding the envelope." Each aircraft has an "envelope of performance"—a top speed, a maximum altitude, a minimum speed before stall, a maximum positive and negative G loading and so on. On first flying a given airplane, a pilot flies conservatively near the center of the plane's envelope—and near the center of his own envelope of skill. As he gains experience, he flies closer to the edges of the aircraft's and his own envelopes. Eventually, he expands both. This is the direction of both growth and progress. For me, expanding the envelope makes a sound metaphor for life—and, not incidentally, coincides rather nicely with my understanding of Mormon theology.

The procedure of expanding the envelope is not necessarily foolhardy, though there is an element of risk involved. But there is a considerable difference in betting on your own ability to climb a rock cliff and playing Russian roulette. One involves confidence in your own ability. The other relies on blind chance. I might try climbing the cliff, but I certainly would not play Russian roulette. Those who do gamble on such sheer chance, whether it is playing Russian roulette or playing the lottery, either have some kind of death or disaster wish, or alternatively they believe that God or Lady Luck holds them in some kind of special esteem and is just waiting for an opportunity to give them a blessing. It is probably that belief that God wants to bless us if only we will provide him the mechanism that makes Mormons such ready suckers for con artists. Such foolishness. Such solipsism. Such pride.

Of course luck plays a part in what happens. However, to me luck is not a personage but mathematical odds. No matter how well you control the dangerous variables, flying experimental aircraft is mathematically more dangerous than reading or knitting. Sometimes you win. Sometimes you lose. But you are certainly less likely to lose if you are skillful, and that is what the game is about—winning by skill against more and more difficult odds.

I do not rule out divine intervention. But if God put us on a hostile world so that we could learn and prove ourselves, he would interfere with

his own system if he intervened very often. Protecting the worthy at all times or answering all prayers on demand would upset the balance so that the world would no longer fulfill its divine and design function of trying us. Perhaps God has to ration blessings to keep from ruining the world.

The notion of God treating us with this kind of benign neglect sounds rather like deist doctrine of God winding the great watch of the world and leaving it to run by itself—the absentee landlord metaphor is commonly applied. Such a belief, however, does not necessarily require an uncaring God. Those who require their God to protect them from every slip, cast him in the role of a doting over-protective parent whose children can never really learn what there is to learn.

I can remember my own father saying that the function of a parent, like the function of a teacher, is to work himself out of a job. Thus a parent's job, like a teacher's—perhaps even God's job—is essentially one of weaning. When I was seventeen, I decided that I wanted to hitchhike to Canada. My father gave me a lecture telling me to be careful about other hitchhikers and warning me about other perils on the road, and then he gave me a ride to the edge of town. The world of 1947 was less violent than the world of today, but I realize now that he knew there were risks to the enterprise. Still he let me go. There were unpredictable things that happened, like getting snowed in at Browning, Montana, where I watched my uncle win two hundred dollars playing pinochle and getting a ride with the chief of the Idaho Highway Patrol. And there was that pretty girl in Lethbridge . . . It was a marvelous adventure.

My son Steve says cynically that adventure is someone else having a very bad time, a long ways away. But adventure is risk willingly taken. It is what makes life more than an ordeal. As Anais Nin says, "Life expands or contracts in proportion to one's courage." Again Mormon theology includes the concept that we can progress eventually to godhood. Adventure is only another name for that struggle for progress. Risk willingly taken is what that free agency is all about—to allow us to gain

the capability and the initiative to become gods. We cannot become adults, let alone gods, if we expect to be divinely coddled. Somehow we must learn to accept the consequences of acts that are our choice. Somehow we must learn that we won that war in heaven.

Of course the danger itself plays a part in the appeal of some things. A hang-gliding friend used to say, "If you're not scared, you're not having fun." There can be quite an adrenalin rush to being scared. Some people find it as addictive as heroin. I was rarely scared flying Cessnas in flight training. They are safe and forgiving. They land and take off at fifty miles an hour, and they have a stall warning horn that sounds if you let the airspeed get too low, and they are very stable. Transitioning from a Cessna to my Vari-Eze was like changing from a four-door Dodge to a hot-rod motorcycle. A slight twitch of the wrist on the stick could make the plane jump like a porpoise. And it landed at ninety miles an hour. I can remember many times on the early flights when I would taxi to the threshold of the runway, make my pre-flight checks and think, "This is the day that I could get killed." Then I would open the throttle.

Later, of course, when I learned its habits, the plane no longer scared me. I delighted in its quick agility and responsiveness. Ninety-degree bank turns became routine. It was a delight to fly, but the danger, or its potential, was part of the fun. When I was no longer scared, flying was still fun, but, I admit, not quite as much. But there were a few times when I had all the adventure I wanted. Once the engine quit on me west of Eureka. I looked for a place to make a forced landing. There was a road within gliding distance, but it was up and down, passing through hilly and rocky terrain and with curves, cuts and fills. I managed to stretch the glide to relatively flat ground and put the plane down—on a curve and with a strong crosswind—blowing the wrong way for the curve. As I skidded to a stop off the side of the road and was shutting off the fuel and turning off the switches, a woman drove up and said, "Are you all right?" "Yes," I answered weakly. Then she asked, "Is anybody picking you up?"

I cannot talk about the scaring on my final flight, because I do not remember the crash. Some kind of psychic-overload dumping apparently occurred. I confess that I have rather mixed feelings about wanting to remember. Perhaps the mind knows best what is good for it.

But the nature of scaring probably deserves some comment. The physiology and psychology of fear have been much talked about. Writers of adventure fiction have often used the phrase, "the brassy taste of fear." Popular wisdom says accurately that those who are frightened may freeze, have dry mouths, and may lose control of the bladder and bowels. I have experienced the dry mouth, but have never known the supposed brassy taste. I have not experienced loss of control of bladder or bowels either, but I have seen it. I have also seen men frozen by fear and unable to move—even when moving was needed to get out of the fearful situation. More commonly what I have felt is a kind of electric shock in the chest. It is probably the result of suddenly released adrenalin—the fight or flight reflex. That effect I have felt many times.

Once, when I was working at a smelter I was on a crew dumping cinders from a train car. The cinders looked like the clinkers from a coal-burning furnace, and ranged from golf-ball size to basketball size and were very ragged and still too hot to hold in your hand. The crew tripped the dump doors in the bottom of the car, and foreman sent two of us up on top of the car with crowbars to loosen the load so it would dump. He warned us about getting over the openings. The rest of the crew banged on the sides of the car with sledge hammers to shake the load down.

I heard the other end go, and I heard a scream. The other man had fallen through with the clinkers. I shouted to the crew to stop hammering. The man was jammed in the bottom door, buried to his neck in clinkers, and with a four foot bank of them above his head and a thirty-foot deep bin below him. One arm was over his head, his eyes were wide open, and he was screaming in pain and terror. I hooked one leg over the top of the car and grabbed his arm to hold him from falling through,

while the rest of the crew dug him out from underneath. He passed out before we got him free. It was a fine team effort directed by a cool foreman. We quite literally saved his life, but none of us were really endangered in doing it.

We put him in a basket stretcher and carried him to the infirmary. The nurse cut his work clothes off and painted his many cuts, bruises and minor burns. He'd wet his pants, but had no serious injuries. When he came to, he asked for his street clothes, dressed and went to his car and drove away. We never saw him again.

I have also seen men freeze. When I was nineteen, we were climbing into an Anasazi cliff dwelling in a side canyon off the Colorado River. The rock wall was about a seventy-degree angle, and we were using the handholds the Indians had chiseled into the sandstone hundreds of years before. It took attention, but it wasn't really scary. My buddy Loren and I were climbing easily, and so was the older man who was with us. Then the man looked down and froze. We talked to him, and he answered fairly rationally, but he could not make his arms and legs move. We had to straddle him and move his limbs one at a time to get him down. He told us after that he had been afraid of heights when he was young and had thought he was over it until he got on the cliff. He was very embarrassed to have to be helped by a couple of kids. When I was a boy we did a lot of that climbing, jumping across high places, and swinging on ropes. Some of it I realize now was pretty foolish, but it built confidence, and none of us got badly hurt. We liked to think it was because we were skillful, but looking back, I suppose we just beat the odds. With all of the kids I grew up with, challenge was constant. Partly we did things because we did not want to be seen as sissies, but more than that was a kind of constant testing of the others and self. We didn't know then about envelopes, but we were constantly pushing out the edges.

Years later in Ohio, a friend spun a plane in on take-off. Two of us raced our cars down the runway to the crash site. I remember parking clear of the plane, in case it should catch fire and running to

the side door. The other man broke out the skylight of the plane and unbuckled the pilot's seat belt. I pulled the pilot out. He was difficult to handle—both arms and both legs were broken—but this was no time to wait for the paramedics. The gasoline was streaming out of the tanks onto the hot engine. I remember worrying about the pilot getting burned, but my only worry for myself was that I might ruin my good leather jacket. The shakes hit me later.

It was the challenge that led me to build the plane in the first place. People have said to me so often, "I wouldn't dare fly in a plane that I built." My stock answer was, "Do you trust someone else more than you trust yourself?" That stock answer rarely satisfied. Not everyone shared my enthusiasm. Still, the answer was genuinely intended. I had never worked with the foam and fiberglass the plane was made of, but then I've done a lot of things that I was not born knowing how to do, and I can read and learn how to do most anything I have a mind to learn. Glen Turner tells me he looks at a job and thinks, "Some man made that thing. I'm a man, so I should be able to make one too. Maybe not as fast or perhaps not as well the first time, but eventually I can." That is a fine approach to life. People can do things—if they are willing to risk.

As I have said, flying was not the first place I had put myself at risk. There were all those barns and trees and cliffs I had climbed. At the smelter, there were scary things like tapping furnaces and rigging steel. I also rode many wild horses; and once in New Mexico, I chased antelope on a Harley 74. I did not court danger, but I did not avoid doing things that seemed fun or otherwise interesting if the risks seemed manageable. In retrospect I realize that I had a thousand opportunities to get killed. I was well ahead of the odds.

When I was in the army, my boss for a time was a black from Chicago who had lied about his age and gone into the army at fourteen. When I knew him he had been in combat in Korea and had been on occupation duty in Germany. He was a sergeant first class, and was nineteen years old. When I found

that out, I said, "Jimmie, you're just a boy." "Ace," he answered, "Taint the years, it's the miles." Greater wisdom I have not found in Israel.

Yes, I busted myself up, and yes there has been a great deal of pain and disability. And unfortunately I will not be able to do some of the things in my golden years that I had counted on doing, and that is too bad. I'm very sorry I crashed, but I'm not sorry I flew.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>John S. Harris, a professor of English at Brigham Young University, has published three books on technical writing and held numerous national offices in technical writing organizations. Poems from his volume, *Barbed Wire* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1974; photography by L. Douglas Hill) have been widely anthologized. Another volume of poems, *Second Crop*, is pending publication. This paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 25 January 1992 at Westminster College in Salt Lake City.

# Drinking, and Flirting with the Mormon Church

Marian Nelson<sup>1</sup>

I STARTED DRINKING in high school. I love to push the limits, and hearing that something was prohibited enticed me to go after it. Being both devious and smart, I indulged in forbidden behavior without my parents knowing. Drugs didn't tempt me then because they weren't available. Guys would take me to little beer joints just outside of town, and we would dance, drink beer, and smoke cigarettes. In Salt Lake City in 1950 that was wicked enough.

When I was eighteen, I married a jack-Mormon, like me; perhaps we were a good match because neither of us followed the Word of Wisdom. We found many others like us, and that reinforced our flaunting of the Church. One time we lived in a neighborhood in Orem, Utah, where the Church was trying to raise money to build a new meeting house. The bishop gave each family a few dollars and told us to follow the parable of the talents and let the money generate more funds for the building.

Some families bought flour, sugar, and eggs and baked cookies or bread to sell to their neighbors. Others bought cloth and made aprons. In my neighborhood we pooled the money from the bishop, bought a Texas fifth of whiskey, and sold raffle tickets with the whiskey as the prize. We turned in more money than any of the others in the ward. We thought we were very clever until the ward clerk called several of us wives in to see the bishop. I had the first appointment and felt sick at heart as my judgement hour arrived. I went into his office and sat stiffly in the hard chair. He asked if I would be the accompanist for Primary. I was so relieved, I accepted the calling.

All my adult life I flirted with the Church. Sometimes I was drawn to the love expressed through caring members. Sometimes I felt the peace of the gospel. Then friends would say, "Let's party!" and I was easily lured away again. My excursions into Mormondom neither helped nor hindered my faltering marriage. Ironically, one of the reasons I divorced my husband was that he began drinking excessively. Hindsight tells me that my wantonness before marriage turned to coldness afterward and drove him to alcohol.

At thirty-five I was suddenly single; single with five children aged nine to seventeen. When I started dating again, I became dependent on alcohol for a good time. Although I rarely attended church meetings, I kept up a pretense of sobriety for the sake of my children. I sent them to church, therefore many of their friends were Mormon. My children would have been embarrassed if their friends were aware of my drinking.

When we lived in Scottsdale, Arizona, my friend Patricia and I began attending night Relief Society. After a few months we started going to a nearby bar to dance instead. We had a lot more fun drinking and slow dancing with good-looking guys than sitting in Relief Society being taught about Chinese opera.

When my children became adults they told me they knew back then what I was doing, and they worried about me. I worried about them also, especially when they were teenagers. But I didn't worry enough to change. I loved to party with my drinking buddies. I would often stay out until all hours of the night and invent excuses to tell my children.

The bishop visited my home once. My children explained to him that their mother was gone for a weekend in Las Vegas with a friend. When I returned, he called me into his office for a talk. Although I considered what I did none of his business, I did go talk with him. He shamed me by telling me the effect I was having on my children. That hurt. For a while my bishop and I tried to deal with my transgressions. I cannot recall my motivations, or whether I was sincere, yet I recall the look on his face and his comment after our last session. He said he usually had a good feeling when someone confessed their sins, but he didn't have that feeling with me. He looked troubled, with good reason, for I soon was back to lies and drinking—and sins worse than drinking.

When my children married or left for college, I solved the "empty nest" problem by packing up and moving to Marina del Rey, California. I was on my own for the first time in my life. I chose to live in a singles complex, where drugs of every sort were the norm. I got caught up in that scene with a passion, and only my abhorrence for needles stopped me from experimenting with the hard stuff that was readily available.

I came home from a business trip to Seattle one warm day in January to find a party going on in my apartment. About twenty-five people were crowded into the small one-bedroom place. They were drinking champagne, eating caviar on stone-ground wheat crackers with a squeeze of lemon, and snorting cocaine. The cocaine was carefully measured out in lines on a mirror placed on the kitchen table. I took a glass of champagne and sat at the table waiting my turn.

Later I went toward the bathroom and my roommate said, "Don't go in there." The door was slightly ajar so I ignored him. A young woman was seated on the closed toilet lid with a bright red scarf wound tightly about her upper arm. She held her arm palm up and in the crook of her elbow the vein bulged dark blue. A guy inserted a needle into the vein and slowly pushed the liquid into her arm. I watched, fascinated: the pulsing vein, the liquid draining ever-so-slowly into her arm, the euphoric

look on her face as she drifted into some heavenly, sweet place. Although I was stoned, I said "no" when offered a hit of heroin. I was intrigued by the place where the young woman seemed to go, but I didn't want anything to do with a needle. The next morning I cleaned away the dried blood splattered around the bathroom.

After several years in Marina del Rey, I moved to Dallas, perhaps for a better job, or to get away from the traffic and pollution of California, or maybe I was tired of life in the fast lane. Unfortunately, moving to Texas didn't slow me down. I remember reading a quiz about alcoholism in the local newspaper. According to the writers, if your score summed 100 or more, you were probably an alcoholic. My score was 205. I didn't drink daily, and I was able to function in my profession despite my use of alcohol, but I fit into most of the other categories. When I did drink, I always overindulged.

The quiz disturbed me. I had never put a label on my drinking. I lived by myself and didn't have to answer to anyone. The article said that many people drink to bolster their self-esteem, to feel socially acceptable. I saw that in myself. Although I was a successful manager of computer projects and confident in the business world, I didn't have social confidence. Before going out dancing or to a party, I would drink a few beers or smoke some pot at home, to get "loosened up."

There was another reason for my drinking. I purposely drank enough to put my conscience to sleep. For example, at a company party I met the wife of a man who worked with me. I wondered if she had figured out why he wasn't in his room at five in the morning when she called, when he and I were on a business trip together in New York. As I talked with her at the party, I wondered, with a pang of guilt, what my involvement with her husband might be doing to their marriage. However, the next time he called, I watered down the guilt with a few glasses of wine and kept ignoring his marital status.

I often heard a voice within me say I was doing things I shouldn't, but I anesthetized myself to drown out the warnings. That's not to say I consid-



ered the seriousness of my moral transgressions; I had completely turned my back on the Church. My records still caught up with me sooner or later, each time I moved, and I became adept at handling telephone calls from the Relief Society president or home teachers. I told them I appreciated the concern and would certainly call if ever I needed them. I never did call.

Once I wanted to go to church. On a sunny December day in Dallas, I received a Christmas card that showed snow falling in a little village. In the picture warm light glowed from the windows of an old steepled church. From somewhere deep inside me there arose a nostalgic longing to sing "Silent Night." One Sunday before Christmas, I went to a nearby Mormon chapel. I enjoyed singing carols during sacrament meeting, but then I made the mistake of going into Relief Society. The very pregnant teacher was talking about journals. She had stacks of elaborate albums, journals, and Books of Remembrance and said how important it was to write daily. She even suggested that the ladies start a journal for a child while it was still in the womb, describing such things as the feeling when it kicked! In my mind I can still see the scrapbook, covered in a blue quilt-like fabric with lace around the edges. I wondered if next she would show us how to put in the results of the rabbit test with her hot-glue gun. I thought, Good grief, what will they think up next? I wondered why the Mormon Church asked so much of its people. I got out of there as soon as I could and vowed never to go back.

Although I didn't give much thought to the moral reasons to stop drinking, I often thought about the practical ones. Every time I got intoxicated (at least once a week) I suffered excruciatingly painful headaches. I also felt deathly ill in other ways, sometimes throwing up violently. The headaches scared me. Several times I even reached for the telephone to call the paramedics, convinced I was going to die.

I thought I was killing myself. And if the headaches didn't kill me, I figured the driving would. I'd be out drinking and people would offer to drive me home. They would plead with me to let them

drive; but no, I insisted that I was perfectly capable of driving. Sometimes I had no idea how I got home, no recollection at all. Many nights I got confused on the way home and ended up in Frisco, Texas, miles north of Dallas.

One time I drove home, very drunk, and came to the place in the road, about three miles from my destination, where the sign says RIGHT LANE, RIGHT TURN ONLY. I was in the right lane, ignored the sign and went straight ahead across the intersection. My car sailed into a culvert, bounced down onto a cement block and then lurched onto the parking lot of the 7-11 store. I got out of the car, unhurt. I laughed. Even the blown-out tire seemed funny to me. I got back into my broken Honda and drove home. The car tried to die on me, but I kept urging it on because I needed to go to the bathroom. To keep the car going, I drove the last mile or two in low gear.

My hangover the next day got even worse when I discovered that the oil pan had been knocked off in the accident; I had driven home with no oil. The motor was completely burned out. That little episode cost me three thousand dollars. When sober enough to think about it, I realized I got off cheap. I could have been killed, or killed someone else. I thought of the many times I had driven while intoxicated or stoned and felt fortunate I hadn't killed someone or been picked up by the police for driving under the influence. But still I didn't stop. I worried I would die from the headaches or kill myself in an accident, but I couldn't give up drinking. Sometimes I gave it a half-hearted try but was too weak to leave booze and drugs alone. It was going to take a miracle to save me from myself.

In December of 1985 I went to Flagstaff, Arizona, to spend Christmas with my twenty-six-year-old daughter, Nancy. The day after Christmas she wanted to show me the beautiful sunset in the national forest behind the towering San Francisco peaks. Four of us piled into her little Honda Civic: Nancy, her friend Kathy, my two-year-old granddaughter, Leah, and me. We planned on arriving behind the peaks as the sun was going down and our timing was perfect. We drove about six miles

on the unplowed forest service road. There were tracks to follow because people had been there before Christmas to cut trees. That day there were no vehicles out there in the biting cold. People were snug at home enjoying their Christmas trees and a roaring blaze in the fireplace.

The Honda was going along like a hydroplane because it was so close to the ground and the truck tracks we were following went deep into the snow. Nancy had a hard time keeping the car in the tracks. Finally, she lost control and the car plowed into a snowbank. Nancy pushed on the gas pedal, but the wheels only spun. We put branches under the tires and pushed and pulled but could not get the car to budge. Nancy said we would have to hike to the highway. She figured it was about three miles ahead. I already felt chilled in the bitter cold, even though I was dressed warmly and had boots. Leah had on a snowsuit, but Nancy and Kathy had only canvas shoes and light denim jackets.

Nancy hoisted Leah onto her shoulders. We started walking. The snow was about eighteen inches deep and crusted on top. I would step and sink, step and sink, step and sink. We hadn't gone far when the truck tracks we were following ended, but Nancy told me she knew the way. After going about a hundred feet further, my heart began to thump in my chest, and my breathing was very labored. I told Nancy I couldn't go on. I didn't even walk in Dallas, where the elevation was not seven thousand feet, and the temperature was not thirty degrees, with eighteen inches of snow on the ground.

Nancy reminded me it was too cold to wait all night, and no one knew we were out there. She said nobody would be along that way for days—to hike out was our only hope. I asked Nancy to let Leah stay with me in the car while she and Kathy went to the highway. Nancy wouldn't hear of it. She said that she got Leah into this, and she had to get her out. So I went back to the car by myself to wait for them to bring help. Soon I could no longer see them.

The fear gnawing in my stomach violated my peaceful surroundings. The silent woods were like a cathedral to me. Pine trees were thick off to the

right, and to the left I could see the purple silhouette of the San Francisco peaks rising in the distance beyond a snow-covered meadow. The full moon gave a soft glow to the meadow and to the snow hugging the boughs of the pine trees. There was not a sound. I became a frightened, silent part of that still, white universe.

Then off in the distance, from the direction where Nancy had gone, I heard a coyote howling. I pictured Nancy fighting off a snarling coyote to save Leah. Cold tears filled my eyes; I felt helpless. After a few hushed minutes, I stepped out of the car, looked up at the moonlit sky and said, "Hi God, remember me?"

I didn't know how to pray. I didn't even know if someone was up there. But it was worth a chance; I had to do something to help Nancy. I asked this God, whom I didn't even know, if he could help them. I thought I would have to pay something for his help, kind of make a bargain with him. I said if he would help them I would . . . I would . . . I would go to church! It occurred to me I ought not make any promises I had no intention of keeping, so I told the God up in the sky that if he would help Nancy I would go to church for one month—four times.

I didn't feel any instant comfort, no warm peace inside I have heard other people describe. I didn't hear any bells ringing in my forest cathedral, and I didn't repeat my plea, although I sat there for hours waiting and worrying. Much later I saw car lights off in the distance, and soon Nancy's friends had the Honda out of its snow trap. I didn't offer up any thanks as we drove back to Flagstaff; I laughed and told Nancy what the rescue was going to cost me—four times at church.

The first Sunday in January, back in Dallas, I thought about my bargain. I had convinced myself that Nancy, Kathy, and Leah made the trek through the forest safely because they were in good physical condition, and the full moon lighted the way. But a part of me said that I had made a promise and should keep it. I debated with myself aloud and finally, just to shut myself up, I called to find the meeting time, put on my burgundy wool suit, drove

to the chapel on Meandering Way, and marched myself into the building.

Each week I counted: one down, three to go; two down, two to go; until I reached the fourth Sunday. The first week I sat on the very back row, my arms folded across my chest, ready to bolt for the door the minute the last amen was uttered. I felt something that first Sunday, but I didn't want to feel it. I worked hard to deny it. The people were friendly, seemed genuinely happy to see me there, but I was not going to get involved. Four Sundays, and that would be the end of it. But my home teacher saw me—I have no idea how he recognized me. He suggested I would enjoy the Sunday School class because they were studying the Old Testament. I thought that very amusing yet went to the Sunday School class the next Sunday, maybe out of curiosity. The class was in the Relief Society room, and I had to move pretty fast to get out of there before all those horribly nice ladies were all over me trying to get me to stay.

I experienced a touch of sadness as I sat in sacrament meeting for the fourth and last time. However, I was glad my little bargain with God was finished. Four down and none to go. And yet on the fifth Sunday, I went to church. During the first few months of church-going, my lifestyle didn't change; I wasn't exactly acting like an angel. Then gradually I became uneasy with what I was doing and entertained the idea of changing. One Sunday in June my home teacher cornered me at church and invited me to attend a temple preparation seminar. He said a group would meet each Sunday evening, and one of the high priests would give the lesson in his own home. I told him he was pushing too far this time, that he had the wrong girl, that I had no desire whatsoever to go to the temple, never had, never would, no, no, no! I thought I spoke clearly, but he didn't seem to understand. He told me to think about it and he would come and get me later that night for the first lesson at his home.

At seven o'clock his wife rang my doorbell and then drove me to their home. It was decorated in warm pastel colors of yellow, pink, and blue, yet I felt cold and uncomfortable. The lesson my home

teacher presented was about our acceptance of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. I was interested; but when he asked if I really believed that Heavenly Father answered my prayers, I had to say I didn't know; I had read that he did, maybe wanted to believe it, but I just didn't know. He asked what I knew about Christ's atonement. I answered: "Jesus died that we might live." That's all I knew.

After a couple of sessions, my home teacher suggested I read some passages in the Book of Mormon. The writer warned,

*I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance . . . for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world [and he said that the devil would] seal you his. (Alma 34:33-35)*

I had considered myself close to death many times in the past few years. What would it be like to live as I had been living, for an eternity? The enormity of my sins started to frighten me. I began to pray earnestly.

The fifth Sunday we met at the home of an airline pilot. When I walked in the door, I thought this must be what heaven is like, all spacious and light, all white, light blue and pale peach. It surprised me that this time I didn't feel out of place. When our host appeared, I was shocked to see that his face was beet red and covered with burn salve. He explained that he had had car trouble driving home from the airport that day. When he looked under the hood, the battery exploded, severely burning his arm and face. He asked my home teacher to give him a blessing.

The pilot sat in a straight-backed chair; another man anointed his head with consecrated oil and then he and my home teacher placed their hands upon the pilot's head. We bowed our heads and closed our eyes. While my home teacher was speaking the blessing, I felt a shiver run through my body. I began to weep. I opened my eyes for a few moments, expecting to see a glow around the three men, or a bright light fill the room. I saw nothing out of the ordinary—but I sensed a change. I felt

the power of Christ and the power of the priesthood come into the room. Tears ran down my cheeks as I experienced, perhaps for the first time, Christ's love for us, his ability to heal us.

But the stubborn part of me was still fighting. Later that night when asked, "Have you determined to serve Jesus Christ to the end of your life?" I answered, "That is a long time, I must be very sure before committing." But the experience caused me to feel something that was most difficult to deny. Perhaps I could change, could believe in the healing as the pilot believed. I felt hope.

The next Sunday night, however, I was jolted out of my complacency. The subject of the lesson was obedience to the Lord's commandments; and when the law of chastity was discussed, I got a sick feeling in my gut. The man giving the lesson said immorality was a sin next in seriousness to murder. I suppose I had heard that before but never with the impact it had that night. I couldn't look anyone in the eyes the rest of the evening. I realized the horrible condition of my soul. It didn't take me long to figure out that I wasn't heading for the temple, but toward some serious repenting. For the first time I knew how much I needed Christ's atonement.

I began to pray, really pray, knowing I sorely needed help from my God and from Jesus. Now I knew what had happened that cold moonlit night by the San Francisco peaks when I said, "Hi God, remember me?" He was there, and Christ was there—reaching out to me.

I asked my home teacher to tell me more about Christ's atonement. He explained that Christ experienced all of our sins, as he knelt and prayed to his Father in Gethsemane. I felt so ashamed. He suggested I read Christ's own words. I read Christ's account of trembling because of pain, bleeding at every pore and suffering both body and spirit. I realized, with exquisite pain of my own, that it was my years and years of ugly sins that were heaped upon Christ in Gethsemane. I caused his pain. I caused the bleeding and the agony. I ached to go back and change what I had done. I wanted to spare him from all the horror. And I couldn't. All I could

do was say, I'm so sorry—I'm so sorry. I knew then I would rather die than place one more sin upon Christ's shoulders. I quit the drinking, and the drugs, and the sleeping around.

When the eight week temple preparation seminar ended, I went to the seashore at Padre Island off Corpus Christi, where I could be alone for a week. I needed to know that Christ had forgiven me. I found a quiet spot along the shore and walked inland, up the side of a barren sand dune. I saw a secluded crater completely surrounded by hills of white sand. I walked down into the crater and knelt on the hot sand and prayed. I wanted some manifestation that my repentance was accepted. Nothing happened. I felt foolish kneeling there in the glaring sun. I walked away from the sand dune into the surf.

Day after day—in the morning, in the heat of the day, late at night—I walked barefoot along the surf, letting my past course through my memory to exorcise the evil. I knew I would have to confess all those years of sins to my stake president. I recoiled at the thought of telling him those incidents. I wept with shame. I waded further out into the surf, praying vocally and singing loudly, "Come unto Jesus, / He'll ever heed you, / Though in the darkness you've gone astray," and "I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me." The surf drowned out my off-key voice. I listened to hear him say I was forgiven. I prayed and pleaded and read the scriptures and sang the songs over and over that week and waited for something miraculous to happen. No bolt of lightning came, no instant peace flooded my soul; I didn't feel any warm glow within my breast. I was devastated.

Toward the end of the week I noticed how beautiful the sky was, particularly when the sun set. The rosy hue of the clouds met the blue of the sky, and I would sit on the sand and watch until the last reflection in the water faded away. I pictured God up there, watching me. I wondered why he didn't talk to me. I also wondered why the sky wasn't as beautiful in Dallas as in Corpus Christi. When I went home to Dallas, to face the ordeal of the confession, I was amazed to see the sunsets were just as fine there. Why hadn't I noticed before?

I met with the stake president many times, in his office and at his home. He counseled me and prepared me for my confession. His wife opened the door on the appointed night, and I told him that I felt I was defiling his home to even mention my past. He assured me everything would be all right; and after we knelt in prayer, I found the courage to tell him all. I recited my transgressions as best I could, not in explicit detail, but not whitewashing anything either. We both wept. We prayed again.

Because of the gravity of the sins and the many years they had continued, my stake president convened a high council court. On a gloomy, rainy Sunday morning, I was ushered into the room where the twelve councilmen and the stake presidency sat around a conference table. I felt ashamed. After the stake president told the gentlemen the nature of my transgressions, they asked if I wanted to say anything. I told them, with tears streaming down my face, that when he recited my sins they didn't sound nearly as horrid as they should. I expected to see distaste on their faces; instead I saw love. I felt love and concern radiating out from them to me. I waited in a small room for their verdict; the stake president and his counselors were in another room praying about the decision, which they would then take to the high council for confirmation. I also prayed. I prayed most fervently. Did I kneel? I don't remember. But I remember how earnestly I wanted to be excommunicated so I could be baptized again. I needed to be baptized. I had read so many scriptures that said, "Repent and be baptized." I was afraid that because they could see I had repented—had changed—they would just gently slap my hand and tell me to sin no more. I wept and prayed and pleaded they would excommunicate me.

When we were back in the high council room, the stake president told me their decision was excommunication. I thanked them from the depths of my heart. I doubt if I will ever again feel such an outpouring of hope and love as I experienced in that room that Sunday morning. When I walked out of the building, the sun was breaking through the clouds; and I thought it had come out to celebrate my joy.

I was baptized again. All my sins were washed away; I became clean and pure. Gradually, seeping into my bones, came the knowledge I had been heard—even at the seashore—and I was forgiven. Now all I have to do is forgive myself.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Marian Nelson is working on a master's degree in English at BYU with an emphasis on creative writing. In 1991 she earned a bachelor of arts degree in theatre and film. She says that prior to attending BYU she had time to have a life. This paper was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 25 January 1992 at Westminster College in Salt Lake City and is also published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 25 (Winter 1992).

# Men and Women and Love

Robert A. Rees<sup>1</sup>

*What's love gotta do, gotta do with it?*

Tina Turner

ONE OF THE GREAT IRONIES of the gospel is that those who deserve most to be loved are often those who are called on most to love. Or, to put it another way, those who are deprived of love are usually those who understand what the absence of love really means, and that realization gives them the burden, no matter how unfair it is, to love those who do not love them. In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin tells his nephew, "The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that *you* must accept *them*. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope." He ends his letter with these words, "We cannot be free until they are free."

The irony for Latter-day Saints is that it is holders of the priesthood who should be showing forth the greatest love, loving women so that they will not feel so alone, deprived, depressed, and unloved of God. The irony is compounded by the realization that generally women are called on to show greater love than the love they receive from priesthood holders. Unless women are willing to do this—and it is totally unjust that they should be asked to—both women and men may be lost. As W. H. Auden said at the beginning of the Second World War, "We must love one another or die."

For centuries women have been trying to teach men that men must let go of power if they are to be truly capable of love. Men don't want to give up power, and so they remain powerless to love women in the way God requires them to do. (What is disturbing is that many women are beginning to use power in the way men traditionally have used it.)

One of the reasons women understand love, in my opinion, is that they have so little power. It is a mystery that only by men's willingness to give up power will men and women achieve the greatest power. A beautiful expression of this idea is found in Alan Paton's novel about South Africa, *Cry, the Beloved Country*. There a black priest named Msimangu says, "There is only one thing that has power completely, and that is love. Because when a man loves, he seeks no power, and therefore he has power."

Lately I have come to a new realization about the celestial kingdom. I used to think that what I had to do to get there was to keep all the commandments. I now understand that all I need to do is to live perfectly one commandment—the commandment to love. There will be many who were perfectly obedient to the law who will not be exalted to that kingdom, I am convinced, because their lives were based more on obedience than on love. Further, I believe that those who entered that kingdom will do so because, having learned to love purely, they alone will be comfortable in the presence of the pure love of God. Others who have loved less completely will seek lower kingdoms.

I believe that the celestial kingdom will be reserved for those who have learned to love themselves, others, and God; the terrestrial kingdom for those who have learned to love themselves and others; and the telestial kingdom for those who chose to love only themselves. Outer darkness is reserved for those who, in spite of all the opportunities given them in mortality, are unable to give or receive love of any kind. As Father Zosima says in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "Fathers and teachers, I ponder 'What is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being

unable to love." Thus, outer darkness is merely the reflection of inner darkness, the heart of darkness in which there is no love and therefore no light.

This is why all the law and all the prophets, all our fears and all our hopes, all our lives and all our deaths hang on the first two great commandments—to love the Lord with all our heart, might, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Rees is former editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, and former director of the Community Education program at UCLA. He and his wife, Ruth, are currently serving as representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Lithuania. He read this and other essays at the October 1989 session of the Association for Mormon Letters at the annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, Las Vegas, Nevada.

# Domesticity and the Call to Art: A Panel

Julie J. Nichols  
Gail Newbold  
Lisa Orme Bickmore  
Margaret Blair Young  
Bruce W. Jorgensen

## Introduction

Julie J. Nichols<sup>1</sup>

IN TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS's book *Refuge*, there is a passage in which Terry asks her mother whether she thinks Terry should have children. Her mother responds,

*"I would hate to see you miss out on the most beautiful experience life has to offer. What are you afraid of?"*

*"I am afraid of losing my solitude, my time to retreat and my time to create. . . . My ideas, Mother, are my children."*

*"I would rather hold you in my arms than one of your books." She paused. "You asked my opinion, and I have given it to you."*

*"And I will follow my feelings."*

*She rubbed my back. "I love you so. . . . Do you know how rich you have made my life?"<sup>2</sup>*

Although I love Diane Tempest's response, this passage makes my stomach tighten up: Is Terry Tempest Williams right? Must it be one or the other—time to create, or time for children? I feel threatened by this passage, because I *do* have four children, and I do *not* have any major publications. Maybe the title of our panel should be turned around: "art and the call to domesticity." What about that call to domesticity? The call to be a good Mormon includes being a good Mormon spouse and parent. Why didn't Terry Tempest Williams—by her own admission "not orthodox"—submit to that the way I did? Have I abdicated my chance to create such beautiful works as she has, because I have four children?

Phyllis Barber outlines why the call to domesticity is particularly a woman's problem:

*Both the Mormon male and female are raised on the ethic of service, but I believe the woman is the more publicly obligated. . . . This is not to say men don't serve. They do, but ordinarily by furthering their careers and operating in an administrative capacity. In everyday practice, the women are the main caretakers. . . . Sitting in my study, typing, thinking for five hours a day seems an unnatural act. I should close down my computer and answer the needs outside my sealed-off, quiet study. The notion of service, that "other" is my responsibility as well as my salvation, makes it hard to believe in my work. Everything else is more important.*

*Another challenge to a female writer is the cultural impulse to be a jack-of-all-trades. In my experience, the LDS woman is not encouraged to excel in one area alone. Balance is the more important quality. Excelling in one area is somehow anti-balance. . . . Continually, I have to brush little winged creatures off my shoulders who hoot at me while I write and tell me I am wrong and I'll never amount to anything and I'm silly to think I have something to say when it's all outlined for me if I'd only listen to people who are wiser than myself. . . . It's wrong to be an ambitious woman in the kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup>*

Some of the pressure not to write, and some of the pressure to be a good wife and mother, is indubitably external. We'll hear plenty about the external forces working against a Latter-day Saint woman who wants to be a writer as the panel proceeds.

But some of it is also internal. We do it to ourselves. Gail Newbold will talk to us about this—shall I call it self-sabotage? Gail graduated from BYU



with a B.A. in journalism in 1977, and since then has written and edited for such newspapers and magazines as the *Deseret News*, *This People*, *Utah Holiday*, and the *New Era*. This year Covenant Communications will publish a book she has written, as yet untitled, whose thesis is that too many Mormon women unthinkingly hand over their agency to supposed authority figures, allowing them to make many of life's important decisions for them. In the book she explores the negative consequences of such abdication and suggests various solutions. Gail is married and is expecting her fifth child in May.

Lisa Orme Bickmore and Margaret Blair Young will extend the conversation concerning this eternal balancing act. Lisa is the mother of five, the wife of one. She is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Utah, working on a dissertation on the American poet James Merrill. She is also an award-winning poet. Her book of poems, *Haste*, is forthcoming from Signature Books.

Margaret is married to Bruce Young. They are coauthors of one of the funniest Christmas letters I've ever read every year. They have four children. Margaret is the author of *House Without Walls* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1990) and of the forthcoming books *Salvador* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992) and *Elegies and Love Songs* (Moscow: University of Idaho, 1992). She has published short fiction in the *Southern Review*, the *Western Humanities Review*, *Dialogue*, and elsewhere, and has won a number of prizes from the Utah Arts Council, *Dialogue*, and other sources.

I was going to say that Bruce Jorgensen will give us our token male point of view, but then I read his notes for his remarks today and they broke my heart. I would no longer presume to try to be funny about the male position on this issue. Bruce is married, the father of eight, including two married daughters and a son studying at the University of Chicago; and grandfather of one with twin grandsons on the way. His B.A. (cum laude) is from BYU, with an M.A. and Ph.D. from Cornell. He is currently head of the Creative Writing section in BYU's English Department. He has published short fic-

tion in *Sunstone*, the *Ensign*, and *Greening Wheat*. He says he goes for short introductions, which is, I suppose, one good reason to end here.

## An Issue of Free Agency

Gail Newbold

I WAS INTERESTED IN THIS TOPIC when Bruce first suggested it because I suppose you could say the prime reason I wrote *On New Wings* was because of my struggle with the issues of domesticity and the call to art.

I was an average BYU coed in the '70s with the usual dreams of marriage in the temple to a handsome, righteous, priesthood-holding man. I came from an average, large, and loving Mormon family. My father had a Ph.D. in higher education and my mother was an honors graduate of UCLA, so graduation from college was also in my plans. But when I finally began to realize my dreams of temple marriage and graduation, this very average, well-adjusted person that I was began to crumble around the edges.

The problem was this. As a journalism major, I'd fallen in love with writing. My work on the student newspaper was exhilarating—and it was me. I didn't want to give it up, nor did I think I should. But the very conservative Mormon man to whom I was engaged (my husband now) assumed I'd follow in the footsteps of his stay-at-home mother and discard the writing in favor of a family. I, of course, wanted the marriage, the writing career, *and* the family.

We argued endlessly about this topic prior to getting married. He always quoted me the words of the General Authorities to prove that he was right and I was wrong. I always seemed to come out the loser. Winning this particular argument would have meant that I wasn't righteous and maybe even that I wasn't worthy to marry him—both intolerable thoughts to me. After each argument, I felt frustrated, angry, trapped, and even terrified.

But like many other LDS women, I married him and I primarily succumbed. I did graduate, but in place of the fulltime writing career I thought I so desperately wanted, I settled first for a part-time dead-end writing job in the literal sense of the word. I was an obituary writer for the local newspaper. Later I drove myself mercilessly at home to write and publish while three babies and toddlers screamed at my feet, clawed at the typewriter keys, or gummed graham cracker crumbs onto my papers. I was determined not to entirely give in and sacrifice my art for domesticity, no matter what my husband or the Church said. And yet in my mind, I was sacrificing a great deal; and believe me, I wasn't very happy about it.

Here's where the free agency issue comes in, which I write about in *On New Wings*. Certainly, as a lifetime member of the Church, I'd been taught the eternal principles of free agency—about my glorious and irrevocable right to choose—and yet my reality was that this grand principle simply did not apply to women. As far as I was concerned, my husband and the Church were *forcing* me into domesticity and away from my art. I honestly did not see that I had very much choice in the matter.

You can probably imagine the damage which occurred as a result of abdicating my agency to these "authority" figures. I became semi-neurotic. I had a lot of a hidden and not-so-hidden resentments toward my perceived jailkeepers—the Church and my husband. I was a consummate martyr and whiner. To make a long story short, after about five years of this, I had a semi-breakdown, got some psychological help, and eventually realized my mistake—meaning that I realized it was I who was to blame for abdicating my agency. "They" (my husband and the Church) did not wrest my agency from me. I gave it to them in my youth and naivete and suffered immensely inside for that mistake.

I gradually began to recognize and exercise my agency. I like to think I did so with greater wisdom and a new ability to view Church leaders as guidance counselors rather than jailkeepers. I've contin-

ued to respond to my dual callings of domesticity and writer in nearly the same ways as before, yet with some very huge and predictable differences.

Because I now possess a deep sense of my own agency and the power I have to focus my life in any direction or combination of directions I might choose, I'm no longer a martyr, I have no resentments toward my husband or the Church, nor do I blame them for my previous unhappiness. I love and cherish them both. I possess a wonderful sense of peace and well being about my life which I know has come in part from finally realizing I can choose for myself—difficult as that decision is for each of us—how much of my life will be spent in domesticity and how much in pursuit of my writing. I love being both writer and mother and can't imagine myself ever being exclusively one or the other.

My main challenge during this peaceful era is what you might expect. As the nagging compulsiveness and exhausting ambitions have subsided, I fear becoming too contented. Isn't it the driven, anguished souls in life who produce the best and most prolific works of art? Does contented domesticity dampen ambition? And yet why are we here on earth at all? To produce great works of art or to have joy? Would any one of us want to trade places with Van Gogh? And who of us who has pursued both a family and writing doesn't recognize that while the writing is deeply essential, no book or article we've ever published will hold a place in our hearts equal to that eternal love and regard we have for our spouses and children?

Obviously, the dream for those of us with families and the yen to write is to find a satisfactory and very personal balance between the two. I continue to give that dream my best shot. This year I'm releasing both a book and a baby.

## No Safe Choices

Lisa Orme Bickmore

I'M GLAD TO HAVE BEEN ASKED to participate on this panel, since it's given me a new rubric for thinking about my poems and my own poetic

practice. As I look at my own life, it strikes me that the meaning of domesticity for me is often a trap: a box, boundaries, a safe choice that has hemmed me into the predictable. I've thought often of the Tillie Olsen story, "Tell Me a Riddle," which has always, at every reading, moved me to tears. In it, the heroine, the old woman Eva, repeats to herself like a mantra, "*Never again to be forced to move to the rhythms of others.*" She also remembers the exquisite sense of her children's physicality, of being flayed by their voices and their needs. I, who have five children, often find myself indulging in fantasies of escape and rebellion—allowing art to represent this contrary pole of my life.

I think this particular binary opposition has its roots in our culture—in the way we've defined art as bohemian, in opposition to the safe bourgeois life. I imagined myself, as an adolescent, first as a concert pianist; but at that point my self-definition did not have room for a family, for marriage. At seventeen, I remember telling my father, when he was worried about my hippie guitarist boyfriend, that I didn't want to live the trapped life of the middle class. What a slap to my father, whose middle-class efforts gave me a home, piano lessons, leisure to study and to think! As I got a little older (not much, since I married at nineteen!), I began to fear my own construction of the life of art: would I not be lonely? And what about sex? (A Mormon girl, I didn't allow myself the space to imagine a sexual life without marriage.) And so I found myself choosing a middle-class life: I married a great guy and proceeded to have those five children, completely ensconced in a house in the suburbs, owning a van and a big dog, shuttling those kids to soccer practice, piano lessons, ballet class—this life left intact the figure of the artist's life as rebellion, as somehow out of bounds, beyond the limits.

I find that my own artistic life functions in bursts. These bursts of poetry, of writing, seem to coincide with tremendous bursts of energy in my life at large, in which my appetites—for food, sex, music, dancing, experience, pleasure, emotion—are seemingly boundless. Sometimes these appetites threaten to rupture every seam that holds my life—

my domestic life—together. It's at these moments that I feel my "safe choice" of a middle-class life traps me, and I chafe at every constraint, real or imagined. At other times, I can recognize that there are no "safe choices"—that the peace and safety of a domestic life is as powerful an illusion as any other. In other words, a domestic life, no matter what pleasure or pain it causes me, does not limit the life that my desires imagine for me. Desire is relentless and, in some deep ways, finally ungovernable. We redirect it, force it underground, ignore it, give in to it. It has its own current and it surfaces periodically. I greet it with awe and rejoicing when it surfaces in my own life, at the same time recognizing the havoc it may wreak in the peacefulness of my domestic life—a peacefulness which is probably pretty rare anyway! As I write these words, my two oldest children are ostensibly mopping the kitchen and the bathroom but are really dancing to Michael Jackson's "Black or White."

For me, then, the more powerful figure for art is that of erotic excess. Rather than thinking of domesticity as a trap and art as rebellion, it helps for me to think of art, of writing, as a way out of the tight little box that those oppositions create. In Tillie Olsen's figures of domestic life as a kind of ecstasy, even though a painful ecstasy, I find my way out. In the figures of annihilation and of celebration that seem to govern my own poems, I am glad to see a critique of the idea of the safe middle-class choice. Even in my own house in the suburbs with the van, the dog, the kids, I experience the artistic moment, which is the moment of fear, anxiety, pleasure, erotic power—all the things that are in excess of what's needed to make life continue. Safety, which for me has always been powerfully figured as the middle class, is illusory, when I think of the things that power the engine of my creative life. It turns out that my domestic life is a plentiful source of the tropes and figures of my poems; moreover, these poems are one of the places I can think about my family—love, lose, annihilate, and celebrate them, so that I can turn back to them with love, as their mother, wife, friend, in all the complicated forms that such love may take.

I'd like to read a few poems that seem to me to represent some of the themes I've been talking about here.

### Abandonment

*The breath of my children hovers over their beds still and unwavering, nothing disturbing the field of their sleep. The spotted dog sprawls on the floor among discarded garments, a moan in his throat as he shifts his great bones. I imagine them leaving one by one, before they're ready, stepping with grown assurance of fortune to be made, but with the height and posture of an eight, a six, a four year old, their baby sister creeping behind. Or they leave all together: no longer mine refusing to cohere as mine, their faces blank, staring past me, not recognizing in my face the face of their mother. And so it must have been me: I must be the one leaving, I walk away and don't look back, so that they lose my face in the crowd of souls who walk away from each other, leaving choirs of dogs behind them as they go. Or I turn a key to fire up the car with one speed and no brakes, the engine of this dreadful plot in which I find a room where the bathroom is white, the surfaces clean: and if I return . . . and when I return, to the house I left, and there is no one there, and I have no address: do I go on to live in that deprivation, the absolute free exile?*

### A Woman in Her Thirties

*stays awake after the household is blanketed in sleep for late silence is the best silence and an awaited solitude single as the moon uncrosses her legs and stands to cross a room looks at the man she knows or doesn't know and says why him? and then why not?*

*dreams dreams that freight her daily steps with faces and gestures she wants to handle with a grave hand a lingering touch smells the heaped pears in the basket and touches the table bearing them up the scent of onion staining her skin knows the music of the voices that inhabit her house its transient phrases and melodies hears the ghostly episodes when the house empties can lay and light the fire that flickers before the altar of preservation that saintly incense smoking flame proclaiming both heart and burning*

### Extravagance

*All this week they have fluttered in the stiff May wind, these tiny painted butterflies, who've travelled, we read, from Mexico, where lived so many of them that these had to go. Hard to imagine what would be too many butterflies, when here drift thousands across the western-most road; when the reticulated triangles of broken wings litter the walks; when I find one, spent, exhausted, on my lap as I drive, the merest quiver of silk to indicate a shred of life. It does not matter, the idea of excess, to those that alight on this spring's exuberance of dandelions. The formula (worked in insect algebra, one guesses) that separates enough butterflies from too many have been worked months ago in northern Mexico; these, the remainder, followed northerly currents to arrive in a place nearly too cold. Cold enough, at any rate, even in May, to halt the migration. If, as we've also read, this is travel which includes no return trip, we are, for this moment, allowed to register the air, alive now as in autumn with fragments of brittle color; to notice how our steps*

*cause a thrill, the beating of innumerable tiny wings;*

*to remark the specimens our children bring us;  
to imagine that we, like emperors, walk on paths  
awash in silken wings; to begin again to define  
too much  
in a world composed on the principles of extrava-  
gance.*

*Straight Way Out*

*Have meditated upon it since the night at the  
amusement park  
when I heard of your death by fire, your own hand  
striking the match.  
Melodrama's one thing, and deliberation another,  
but on the lawn  
you flickered between them: a simple self-  
consuming act;  
a gesture of decision  
That I admire very much—even if it is not my  
way. Imagining this life  
as a room, and one way out through the door, if the  
door is only  
minimally cluttered;  
Or if in the presence of a single heat, what to one  
might seem  
an insurmountable accumulation might simply  
evanesce, evaporate,  
become the ghost of that life  
that is to another as palpable as a body one longs to  
touch.  
and one does not step over or step through  
that loved body or even  
that body's shadow. One picks one's patient way  
around  
the circuits of that life, the room of which begins to  
seem a  
whole  
world, with a door or window  
that hold themselves open with the idea of  
openness,  
toward which one never seems to make one's way . . .  
I have  
tried  
to understand the suicides  
their impatience—the press they make for that  
open door—  
and despite the stolid doggedness that keeps me  
wending  
my way around this room*

*and the temptation, as of a body one longs to touch,  
of their  
swift  
unheeding feet: the room itself begins to change  
and the clutter grows roots  
and becomes something green—a potted fern,  
maybe even an ash  
tree, a sapling, but with flowers unlike anything  
natural—  
flowers the color of flame.*

*Happiness*

*As if it were a reward somehow for hope—  
it is a useless idea. You find it somewhere  
along the arc that begins at expectation, that  
disappointment ends. If you were to predict  
a point on that arc at which it would be likely  
to occur, it probably would not be in bed  
on a snowy morning, with the milkman's footsteps  
printed on the step, then turning away; with  
the tousled sheets just warm on your legs, your body  
deciding whether to relax into sleep, or gather  
to rise; the baby's head turned away from you;  
her every breath under the quilts lifting them  
with a shudder, then a sigh. Who would ever  
dream  
such a moment as one particularly happy?*

*Night's Last Child*

*In the summers we used to play at night until  
the moon was high over us and the sky had filled  
with stars: then we all went in, slamming screen  
doors behind us. And collapsing into beds,  
still sweaty, we fell into sleep, as if sleep  
had found us in the last game of hide and seek.  
In that neighborhood, the mothers trusted us  
to each other: and we had each other to find  
when we were hiding. The same kids in my  
neighborhood now: and as nights get longer  
and the smaller ones disappear into houses,  
older kids remain, their hair and skin sweaty  
and warm, down to the last kid alone in the  
evening.  
I see them riding bikes home at ten o'clock;  
the same kids who walk the railroad tracks,  
steps slow, measuring the ties; slow, and as straight  
as the path a boy ran in the last field  
of winter wheat, a breathless passage.*

*Between Us*

*In the night we sleep in endless dialogue,  
and if a child creeps between us, our bodies  
wake to argue as if our voices had never ceased,  
as if we never slowed a breath or word.  
In a twisted nightgown I lie awake after sleep  
takes him, put my arms around him, listen  
to his breath's cadence. The child sleeping  
between us, her hair smells of white soap.  
I stroke it with my right hand; the left under  
the pillow like a slice of dreamer's wedding cake  
I might wish upon, dream endlessly of endless  
marriage. One man, one mind. I carry  
the girl back to her bed, my shadow moving  
before me on the wall washed in white  
midnight. No child between us. In the dark  
I make my way back to my discontent,  
to him sleeping, as if sleep might close something;  
me waiting to ease into a less interrupted sleep.*

## What I Came to Say

Margaret Blair Young

**B**EFORE GIVING THIS PRESENTATION, I had a woe-fully appropriate nightmare: I was taping this talk while my children ran wild all over the studio. When I chased after them, the technician frantically informed me that they were filming this too. My chaotic motherhood had just been captured for posterity on film. When I finally made it back to the microphone, harried and exhausted, the technician told me my time was up. I yelled, "But I didn't say what I came to say!" The answer was a shrugged "Sorry."

There is a message in my nightmare. Surely my subconscious was teasing me about my pretending expertise on the balancing act I'm attempting. But there's something else, too. The words "I didn't say what I came to say" have haunting resonance to me as a writer. I do have things to say, and I want to say them—and say them well—before I finish mortality. I even have things to say about chaos (and I can speak as something of an expert on that sub-

ject). And I have things to say about children and motherhood which I couldn't say without trying to negotiate my pilgrimage through both my art and domesticity.

I have divided this presentation into four parts, for each of my four families: (1) the family in which I was raised, (2) my first marriage, (3) my single parenthood, and (4) my current (eternal) marriage.

I am the daughter of two English majors. Both my parents loved language. Dad had a gift for foreign tongues; Mom was a writer and an actress. Dad, empowered by his gifts, his ambition, and his gender, went on to become a linguist. But Mom, compelled by her culture, enchanted by the motherhood mythology, was convinced she had to devote all her energies to the five children she had birthed within the first six years of her marriage.

Because of the way she helped me with my English papers, my theatrical auditions, and my early poetry, I knew she was a gifted wordsmith. But her domestic duties consumed her talent. To this day it saddens me when Mom tells me a great idea for a story and then suggests that I write it. I always tell her to use her own talents, and am always chagrined when she answers, "Oh I can't write." I usually say something like, "Mom, where do you think I got it from anyway?"

I sensed early on that there was a great unfairness in the system where my dad was allowed to follow his dreams, develop his mind, and Mom was—in a very real way—relegated to maid service. Today, my mother is my greatest support and biggest fan. I sense that when I write, I'm doing it for both of us. Now, I don't want Dad to come off as a stereotypical male tyrant. I blame the injustice done to Mom's talent more on the cultural perceptions and role definitions of the time they raised their family than on him. My father is a very good man, and as I mentioned, a lover of language, a linguist.

Foreign languages were and are a part of my life. When other kids went to Disneyland for their summer vacations, the Blairs did things like travel to Quebec to learn Esperanto, or to Guatemala for Cakchiquel. One of Dad's favorite language teaching techniques is the Lozonov method, wherein the

participants are almost hypnotized into total relaxation so their inhibitions are minimized. Thus unencumbered by fear of failure, they are ready to imbibe the language, absorb it without dissecting its components. I find that when I learn a language in this relaxed environment, I end up with lousy grammar, but no accent. (This will be relevant later on.)

That's the heritage of my first family: language and love.

My first husband could well be categorized a batterer. Abused as a child, he simply didn't know how to have a give-and-take relationship. He had obsessively rigid gender-role definitions and a violent temper which exploded at least every other day.

He considered my writing a sort of girl thing, like knitting or crochet. I could not possibly count the times he said something very similar to a Sally Taylor poem: "I work my ass off all day and you just sit around here on your duff." It was quite upsetting to him when I didn't get the house clean enough to meet his standards, and he felt my writing was to blame.

He was right. Writing was a high priority for me. Not higher than my daughter, but definitely higher than housework. When my daughter napped, I wrote—regardless of how messy she had gotten things before finally conking out. During the three years of that marriage, I struggled valiantly to keep up with the house, working far harder towards order than I ever had in single life. But the house usually won.

Though there were frequently sticky spots on the floor from my inadequate mopping, I wrote five novels. Had my husband known then what I now know—that my writing was utterly lousy, unpublishable—he probably would have been even angrier at how I was wasting my time. But in my unguided, determined, rather desperate way, I was teaching myself about structure, development, character, and plot—lessons I had to learn sometime. The day I left him, I printed out the beginnings of what would eventually be my first published novel, *House Without Walls* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990).

I left the marriage emotionally bruised, vulnerable, and sick. Having failed in the most important mission of mortality, I clung to my writing—the only thing I felt I was good at. When my mother picked me up at the airport, she didn't even recognize me. She told me later that it was as if my light had been put out. The manuscript I had in my suitcase and the two-year-old girl clinging to my hand were the focus of all my dreams now.

Single parenthood. Guilt. Bitterness. Emotional roller coaster. I worked full-time as the secretary of the Geology Department of USU. My daughter was in a day-care center. I felt I was cheating her of a normal childhood by my hours away from her, and so spent all my after-office hours with her, doing Mommy-daughter things.

As for my writing, I took it to work with me. My employers were very understanding. They knew I wanted to be a writer and didn't mind my working on my book when I wasn't busy with departmental stuff. I also worked on it during lunch hours.

By the end of the year, the novel's first draft was done, and I had some encouragement from Horizon Press. An editor there even called me to make specific suggestions—which proved tremendously helpful, even though Horizon ultimately rejected my book.

Now here's where the Lozonov Method comes back: I was under such stress at this time (as I had been in my marriage) that I was forcing my plots, manipulating them, rather than letting them flow where my characters and words would lead them. I was exercising total control, and my work was suffering because of it. Just as my language learning had always been inhibited by over-concern with grammar and rules of speech, my writing was now stunted by my concern with happily-ever-afters and my fear of failure. I was jamming my plots past any opposition, not letting them grow organically. What I needed, of course, was relaxation, a support system, some nice ego strokes. What I needed was Bruce Young.

I married him in 1985. I think it no coincidence that my writing took off almost immediately. Within the first year of our marriage, I sold my first

story to a reputable journal—*The Southern Review*. Soon thereafter, I sold *House Without Walls*, and finished another, much better book called *Salvador* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Press, 1992.)

I won't detail my current successes as a writer. That would not only be self-flattering but a bit deceptive, because I consider myself still an apprentice. But I will say that life has been fertile since my marriage to Bruce. I've had three more children and a lot of publications.

The reasons?

- (1) I got some much needed guidance from teachers and editors.
- (2) I read contemporary writers to see what they're doing—to set my standards high.
- (3) Bruce proved himself to be, as a Spanish cliché goes, *mi media naranja*. My other half. Mom said that when he and I started dating, she saw my light turn on again. Bruce shares my mind, respects me, not only supports my writing but checks up on my spelling and little details of my plots. He recognizes that my writing is every bit as important to me as his career is to him. It is more than a diversion or a "girl thing"; it is a NEED. It's sanity for me, my mid-afternoon refreshment.

I don't need to write all day, but I do need at least an hour a day (usually during kids' naps.) When I get this writing time, I am a better mother: more patient, more able to handle stress. And I love having a book or a story that (unlike housework) the children can't undo.

Housekeeping? We struggle with it. And I do mean *we*. We keep house as a family. I get plenty bitchy when I feel people are expecting me to be the maid. Maid I ain't. I'm a wife, a mom, and I'm a writer. My children know I write, that I do it seriously, and that I need time for it. They enjoy my success right along with me and seem far more proud than resentful.

I consider the development of my talent a heritage for my kids, especially my daughters. By insisting on writing time for myself, I am showing them that a woman's needs and talents *matter*, that they have a right to pursue their dreams, that they

need time to themselves, and that they have a right to expect family support. I suspect I'll be angry if my girls spend their own wifehoods making beds and doing dishes at the expense of their talents. I know I'll be angry if my sons keep their wives in paralyzing role restraints.

And I wish I could send that heritage backwards as well as forward: to my own mother, who in all likelihood is far more talented than I. Now that her children are grown and she has time, I want her to return to herself, to her own fertile mind and possibilities. Speaking as one of the children she chased to the ends of chaos, I want her to say—for herself, and in her own words—what she came to say.

## A Rehash from Memory of What I Think I Remember I More or Less Said

Bruce W. Jorgensen

I THINK I SHOULD ACCOUNT for my presence on this panel. Really, rather than a token man, we ought to have the husbands of these women—the real men. The panel wasn't exactly my idea, though it responds in a way to a topic in the call for papers I issued last winter, and I'm here by invitation. The idea happened when I read proposals for papers from Gail and Julie and realized they might fit together. I suggested a panel to Julie and Gail, it developed from there, and it was never really clear who was the moderator or whether it had a moderator or not.

Julie, on behalf of the others, invited me to join the panel by mid-December; but, to illustrate our topic, I didn't actually get down to writing notes for it until 26 December, after I'd turned my grades in and was lying on the waterbed recuperating by watching *Frankenstein* on AMC. And there it was in Laemmle's 1934 film:

Elizabeth reads to their friend Victor a letter from Henry to her, "the first word in four months":



*"You must have faith in me, Elizabeth. Wait. My work must come first, even before you. At night the winds howl in the mountains. There is no one here. Prying eyes can't peer into my secret." What can he mean? . . . "I am living in an abandoned old watchtower close to the town of Goldstadt. Only my assistant is here, to help me with my experiment."*

A couple of days later, after a shopping trip with most of the family at the Factory Outlet Mall near Park City, I thought of another popular-culture image I needed: Thurber's famous cartoon of the house as mother/wife/monster looming over the scared little man. I should have arranged for a projector so you could see it again.

In relation to our topic, I've lived in that old abandoned watchtower near Goldstadt, and I've lived in that sinister and devouring house.

In relation to Julie's quotation from *Refuge*, which I also had read, I remember that maybe a decade ago I remarked—I think to Doug Thayer—that I never knew how much I valued and needed solitude, how much use I had for it, until I'd given up most of my chances for it, and most of my rights to it—if there is any such right. And the choice is not as simple as it may sound, not an either/or that I can conceive of deciding once and for all.

I don't want solitude—as far as I know—day in and day out. When I've had it—as in the fall of 1979, for about fourteen weeks, or the summers of 1985 and 1986, six to seven weeks each—I've not liked it in unremitted form; in fact I found it crazy-making, and the only help for it was to work, hours and hours, once or twice an all-day-all-night marathon, as long as nineteen hours at the keyboard. I am, on the whole, glad of those hours, those weeks, though the work was modest after all, and little of it brought to completion even yet. But I don't want a solitary life; I want marriage and family; and I want, so far, to work as a teacher, among students and colleagues. Yet it's true, too many days of each week, that the only place I can sometimes count on being able to read for ten consecutive, undisturbed minutes, is the faculty men's sauna in the PE build-

ing. I sometimes write in a notebook there, but the covers warp and the pages wrinkle and the ink smears from sweat.

In Syracuse, 8 December 1979, almost at the end of one of my seasons of somewhat productive but not really happy solitude, I told my friend and mentor George P. Elliott I wanted to ask him "for some small practical advice on the big question: How To Live." "Oh that," he said; "I'm full of advice on that."

He told me how he'd ordered his life when it was going well (as it had not gone for that year when he'd had almost singlehandedly to put SU's writing program back together); he was taking medication for hypertension, and he died the next spring, about three days after his last class: strictly no interference from family (severe emergencies of course excepted) for three hours every day.

*Your wife will resent you, your children will worry, you'll have to shortchange your students some—but you'll have to do it to write. If you're not that ruthless you're not a writer—because you're not writing.*

"But not-writing is too poisonous" (I was somewhat more Romantic then than now).

"It is. And the other is ordinary domestic friction, which you'd have anyway."

So far I've not been ruthless, never consistently and never for very long. And I guess I've been testing how much poison I can take. Me and Mithridates—he died old.

Tillie Olsen in *Silences* (one of three books I'd hoped to reread or read in preparation for this panel; I also didn't re-read Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* or read *A Room of One's Own*) writes of the creative necessity of "Full self: this means full time as and when needed for the work."<sup>4</sup> I've very seldom had that (whatever Donna may think), Henry James's "depth and continuity of attention and meditation" (160) or his "quiet, patient, generous moernings"—almost never. And I suspect that in our household—eight children at maximum, now down to four—it would not be possible for an angel, let alone a human being, to make, as Joseph

Conrad's wife did for him, "the even flow of daily life . . . easy and noiseless for me by a silent, watchful, tireless affection" (12).

Tillie Olsen's *Silences* begins with the dedication: "For our silenced people, century after century, their beings consumed in the hard, everyday essential work of maintaining human life. . . ." (6) In 1962 when Olsen first gave her lecture, I was graduating from high school; in 1965 when it was published, though I often read *Harper's*, I missed it. I needed it: a warning about my own life, so much of which would be "consumed in the hard, everyday essential work of maintaining human life."

I, too, have had—or thought I had—"to let writing die over and over again in me" (6); have, like Melville, felt myself "pulled hither and thither by circumstances," damned by the dollars I had to earn, unable to enter "the calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man ought always to compose" (7). Melville was thirty-one or thirty-two when he wrote that to Hawthorne: about my age when I settled into Provo and teaching full time. I'd read Olsen's title essay "Silences" by then—given to me by a woman colleague at Ithaca College where I'd taught part-time four years while trying to be full-time graduate student and didn't manage to be much of a husband and father, let alone church worker. And I don't even have a Melvillean "final hash" product to show for it, either. A decent dissertation and a decent though overloaded and underpaid job, yes.

I think of Levi Peterson's long "foreground silence" (which he tells me was necessary to give him something to write). Or of Gene England's, before his first book. I'm in one, too, I guess, though mine bids to be longer—I hope not terminal as well. I often wonder, will I (like Hemingway's Harry in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro") destroy my talent by not using it? I have too little time for "receptive waiting" (13), terribly seldom have what Katherine Anne Porter called an "undistracted center of being" (13).

There is almost nothing I'd want more to write about than Mormon domestic life (I've been saying so since about 1970, midway in my first full-time

teaching job, between degrees); nothing I'm more convinced we need good fiction about; but when, in Mormon domestic life, does one have time to do it? Men or women: when?

Kafka's words are a dire warning—or diagnosis: "every unfulfilled inner duty becomes a misfortune that never leaves. What strength it will necessarily drain me of" (14). Donna, I suspect, might not believe this, but Rilke speaks for me: "Anything alive that makes demands, arouses in me an infinite capacity to give it its due, the consequences of which completely use me up" (15). Olsen seems to read Rilke as referring this "infinite capacity" to the call of "things" he will make poems of. But I assume it is the truth about most ordinary human beings; and I mean it as aimed the other way—toward laundry, taxi service, babysitting, dirty dishes, students' questions and their awkward sentences and images. Olsen sees Rilke's refusal of domesticity as "extreme—and justified" (15). I don't know. Jim McConkey, my friend and teacher at Cornell, who incidentally first urged me to read *Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet*, said he couldn't do his writing knowing that his doing it was in any way injuring his wife or children. And his "product" is modest, though not at all "hash" but some of the best prose work—on domesticity, mainly—that I know in recent American literature. Annie Dillard has called his *Courted Memory* "the great nonfiction masterpiece of the twentieth century."<sup>5</sup>

Olsen claims, "A man can give full energy to his profession" (27). Ha! A man not only (sometimes) can but is (nearly always) expected to. But if he wants to practice an art *and* support a family, he has a problem. I think of Anne Tyler's essay on her writing habits, "Still Just Writing" (I'm prompted to call these notes "Still Not Writing Much"), where she briefly alludes to her husband's predicament as a writer *and* a professional:

*I could draw some conclusions here about the effect that being a woman/wife/mother has upon my writing, except that I am married to a writer who is also a man/husband/father. He published his first novel while he was a medical student in Iran; then he came to America to finish his training. His writ-*

*ing fell by the wayside, for a long while. You can't be on call in the emergency room for twenty hours and write a novel during the other four. Now he's a child psychiatrist, full-time, and he writes novels in the odd moments here and there—when he's not preparing a lecture, when he's not on the phone with a patient, when he's not attending classes at the psychoanalytic institute. He writes in Persian, still, in those black-and-white speckled composition books. . . . Often, I wonder what he would be doing now if he didn't have a family to support. He cares deeply about his writing and he's very good at it, but every morning at five-thirty he gets up and puts on a suit and tie and drives in the dark to the hospital. Both of us, in different ways, seem to be hewing our creative time in small, hard chips from our living time.<sup>6</sup>*

I think of Tyler's fairly steady output—roughly a book every two years—and of Taghi Mohammed Modarresi's small output, at least in English: one novel so far that I know of. And then I think Vincent McHugh's advice in his *Primer of the Novel* no longer sounds like cheap-and-easy male cynicism:

*A novelist should take the trouble to be born with a good income. . . . Failing that, the novelist should arrange to be a girl child. She can marry early, lock the children in the broom closet, and write her books. This may be bad for the children, but they will probably turn out no worse than most writers' children do. Any woman who has enough organizing ability to write a good novel should be able to condense the housework into two hours of the morning. Then she is free.<sup>7</sup>*

I realized—in 1985 or 1986—that I could do two things pretty well, but not three. The past two years I've been doing four—five if you count the Sunday School presidency. None really well, writing least of all. When I've done my teaching for BYU and for Meridian School, where our children go (and read the texts and papers I have to take home) and when I've done the laundry and whatever else falls to me in the household, then I might have time to write, but not often. The British novelist John Braine says, "A price has to be paid for

everything you want; the price for writing in your spare time is the highest of all." It means "sacrifice—of pleasure, of rest, of friendship, even of love."

Most people accept that to sit on a committee, to learn to play a musical instrument, to learn one's lines for a play, require a definite expenditure of time and absence from the family circle. It's only writing which is supposed to be the result of some magic process, which isn't taken seriously. For a girl to stay in to wash her hair would be a perfectly acceptable excuse for refusing an invitation; for her to stay in to write wouldn't.<sup>8</sup>

Tillie Olsen quotes Thomas Mann's daughter Elizabeth Mann Borghese: "No one said to Toscanini or Bach or my father that they must choose between their art and personal, family life" (30). Well, it seems to have been said to LDS men and women both: not only are women told that their "true vocation" is "husband and family" (29), but really it's not much different for LDS men, if we accede to the widespread understanding of David O. McKay's "No other success can compensate for failure in the home." (I had the comeback to that decades ago.) I can't believe that David O. McKay meant that sentence as coercively as it has been used since he spoke it. Maybe he was simply stating the truth, not coercing any of us, women or men: every home—starting with God's—fails, and nothing can compensate for that, so don't expect it to. But this doesn't mean that "success" in the home, whatever that would be, will compensate for any other failure. It would be sentimental abuse of one's family to suppose that.

We are all, Mormon men and women both, going to be divided, as Rilke's phrase has it, "into one who earns and one who creates" (162). What else can we be, in middle-class American Mormondom, men and women both, now? That will be our dilemma, and I don't know how we will solve it.

## Notes

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mother of four living in Provo—to her constant astonishment. This panel was delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Mormon Letters, 25 January 1992 at Westminster College of Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup>Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), 220-21; see also 51.

<sup>3</sup>"The Mormon Woman as Writer," *Dialogue* 12 (Fall 1990): 115-16.

<sup>4</sup>*Silences* (New York: Delacorte, 1978), 12. Additional quotations from this work, including writers Olsen quotes, are cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>5</sup>Comment on dust jacket of McConkey's *Rowan's Progress* (New York: Pantheon, 1992).

<sup>6</sup>In *The Writer on Her Work*, edited by Janet Sternburg (New York: Norton, 1980), 5-6.

<sup>7</sup>*Primer of the Novel* (New York: Random, 1950; Octagon, 1975), 267.

<sup>8</sup>*Writing a Novel* (New York: McGraw, 1974), 19-20.

# Confronting the Personal Voice: Ethics and the Personal Essay in Technical Writing

Karin Anderson England<sup>1</sup>

ROBERT BELLAH AND HIS CO-WRITERS, in *Habits of the Heart*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) express concern that modern American society has overemphasized the need to separate our public and private selves. Part of the reason we have polarized these parts of our lives so dramatically is that we value open-mindedness more than almost any other virtue, especially in an academic environment. We are reluctant to impose any of our values, preferences, or beliefs upon others, to appear so committed to a system of values that we cannot embrace or even consider other points of view.

In spite of the social benefits of this mentality, it has also exacted a heavy price on our moral commitments and ethics. We can become so apologetic about our own personalities and perspectives that we become academic and professional nonentities as well. We have, in many ways, lost the ability to see our public roles as integral parts of our larger personal selves.

In English departments, we often promote this polar mentality by separating technical, disciplinary discourse from the forms we see as more relevant to the humanities. We encourage creative writers and essayists, maybe even critics, to find their personal voices as we teach them to write. Too often, though, we encourage technical writers to obscure their voices, to sound like badly programmed robots.

Even though important differences exist, I do not believe that personal and disciplinary writing should be seen as antithetical, or even radically dissimilar. Therefore, I assign writing at the beginning of my technical composition courses which demands the development of a personal voice, including response papers, short autobiographies which

detail both personal and professional experiences, and, most importantly, essays which demand individual thought and very personal reflection. By assigning the personal essay, I am trying hard to help my students see that the thinking, writing, and communicating they do in their public postures cannot be divorced from their private personalities. I am trying to show them that the self who describes a complex personal dilemma is essentially the same self who discusses the intricate processes of a corporate takeover. I hope, that by assigning personal and technical writing together, I can make it clear that the voice which describes firsthand experience can carry the same authority and relevance to a description of library or field experience. My students find their voices first in personal writing. After that, their technical writing usually carries the same natural voice, even when the tone must change to accommodate another genre.

One of the benefits this approach has for me as the instructor is that it makes student papers—all of them—more interesting to read. Technical writing, by its nature, tempts the author to be dry, lifeless, and passive, although it need not be so. I once asked a friend who worked in the Social Science Department to find samples of successful graduate writing that I could show to my students as prose models. The letters of intent that she gave me were some of the most classically bad prose I have ever read. They epitomized the vices I hope my students will learn to avoid. Here are a few sentences from the longest and most spectacularly wordy:

*In accordance with my desire to pursue a Ph.D. degree in the College of Home, Family, and Social Sciences I hereby submit a letter of intent in support*

*of my application. Not only do I presently possess a keen interest in graduate study, but I have attempted to prepare myself in such a way as to be qualified and versed in related subject matter. . . . Following the reception of my undergraduate degree I was accepted for graduate study in the Department of Educational Psychology with an emphasis on counseling and guidance. Through the successful completion of course work including [a long list], I further enhanced my preparation through direct involvement with youth and families in a counseling setting.*

And so on. Ironically, most of my students can write in this stilted, pedantic style much more easily than they can in their own natural voices. Being assigned a personal essay often helps them to establish the writing voice they have been developing for years in their oral conversations. Students naturally make personal writing into interesting, worthwhile reading. A personal essay has obvious human relevance, because it expresses the concerns and interests of a distinct human being; and once a student has identified herself as a thinking, perceptive entity in a personal essay—once she has seen the unique details of her life as a roommate, daughter, friend, or lover—she can go on to see the details of her experiences as a student, a psychologist, a part-time J.C. Penney clerk—without losing the freshness and individuality of her identity.

Another advantage of assigning a personal essay to my students is that it helps them eliminate oral assumptions in their later compositions. When they can see the difference between their personal experiences and those of their audience, they also begin to recognize that their academic and professional backgrounds often need detailed explanations. Clifford Geertz, in his essay "The Way We Think Now: Toward an Ethnography of Modern Thought,"<sup>22</sup> says that members of academic disciplines have become so specialized, sometimes even within their own departments, that they have become mutually unintelligible to one another. Our academic languages and cultures have become so distinct that they can almost be studied anthropologically.

I see this fatal differentiation beginning even at the undergraduate level. Economics majors forget—

or worse, enjoy—the fact that others do not understand their terms and formulae. Psychology and sociology majors can too easily forget the necessarily communicative natures of their fields after immersion in their respective canons. History majors can become hopelessly allusive for those of us stalled at the date of the Norman Conquest. English and philosophy majors can become so infatuated with the abstractions of criticism and higher truth that they lose contact with their more pragmatic peers.

Pulling my students out of their professions, even for one writing assignment, seems to remind them that not everyone has the same knowledge and assumptions that they do. Describing Kalispell, Montana, to a classmate from New Jersey is a thought-provoking task. Discussing the personal significance of a cherished object requires a renewed consciousness of family quirks, unique skills, and, frequently, terms and procedures uncommon to other members of the class. Writing a personal essay helps my students remember that they are, not only personally, but academically and professionally, familiar with subcultures and dialects which need explanation in other settings.

Ultimately, I believe it is impossible to teach good technical/disciplinary writing without this emphasis on voice. Whether we acknowledge it or not, writing of any kind is an innately personal activity. We discover and disclose ourselves by the words we choose, the sequences we align, and the details we find significant. In a way, most of the writing we do is a variation on the personal essay.

I usually follow the personal essay assignment with a resumé and letter of application, because that kind of professional correspondence is actually little more than a character sketch—a self-portrait of the writer. The tone changes; language becomes more formal, details less "conversational," but the first person "I" is real. And when the "I" is real it must answer for itself, which is the most important reason I emphasize personal writing. My students are less comfortable, after writing consistently in their own voices, in misleading a potential employer with an inflated resumé. Yet, personal experience, formerly seen as irrelevant to a profession, often be-

comes significant enough to make a resumé genuinely unique and attractive.

Surprisingly, one of the "technical" assignments that most resembles a personal essay is the process paper. My stipulations on this assignment are that it must be written to an audience unfamiliar with its purposes and procedures and that it be one which the author can describe from firsthand experience, well enough that a reader can perform the task. I ask for specialties, not everyday knowledge. I want more than dry instructions; I want to trust the advice and authority of an expert.

When I read these papers, I discover remarkable things about the people who are my students. I have learned how to show-clip a beef steer from a young man raised on an Idaho cattle ranch. I have learned how to host a formal diplomatic dinner from a Washington, D.C., intern. A fifty-five-year-old mother of six, who thought she knew nothing of value, taught me the principles of producing fine yeast breads and confections. The papers have, as a whole, been interesting, relevant, and credible because of the people who have allowed their voices to emerge with confidence and authority.

Voices discovered in personal writing are, for my students, most difficult to maintain in research writing. It is exceptionally complicated to juggle information gathered from journals, reference books, and government documents. Students lose confidence in their own judgment and cannot make themselves believe they can sound authoritative enough for the genre. They must synthesize so much information in such a short time that they frequently resort to weak, plagiaristic paraphrase and excessive quotation. I have had best results in overcoming these problems when I reemphasize the principles of a personal essay. I tell my students to know the material so well that they write the first draft of the paper without notes, only a bare outline, almost as if it was from their own experience. They can go back (if I have taught them true principles of revision), piece by piece, augmenting and documenting. I tell them to draft their papers freely using the "I's," "me's," and "you's" of more personal writing. They can edit to eliminate the chatty tone—

without losing the voice. I tell them to choose a very particular person to address as an audience—someone they know well, someone intelligent but without the same academic specialties, or an academic peer, according to the circumstance.

Obviously, there are dangers inherent in making personal and disciplinary writing nearly identical in my students' minds. One or two students every semester become so enamored with the idea that every assignment becomes a self-searching, too-personal confession or an amateurish imitation of the stylists in a freshman anthology. Some students are so hesitant to reveal themselves or are so comfortable polarizing their public and private selves that the demands of personal disclosure are repugnant. But, as a whole, my students have been responsive and their writing has progressed in surprisingly concrete, measurable ways.

In summary, here is a list of what I see as the greatest advantages of reintegrating our private and public writing, both as teachers and as students:

First, personal writing is interesting, to me and the student. The boredom of writing and grading is, thankfully, reduced. Personal writing is concrete and more naturally organized, qualities which carry over to technical writing when we recognize the similarities. Personal writing helps an author see the differences that exist between "personal" and "public" selves and to manipulate them appropriately in writing. It also helps a writer develop a sense of what is and is not in a reader's range of experience. It highlights unique experiences and perspectives in a writer's mind that must be explicitly conveyed to an audience.

Writing personally and technically, in tandem, helps us reintegrate our larger selves, dissolving many of the polarities that fracture our perceptions of self. This reintegration leads to the most important point, in my mind. Emphasizing personal voice in all kinds of writing makes us go back to our ethics and honesty. Language can create deceits—not just outright lies, but, possibly more dangerous, subtle exaggerations, convenient omissions. The depersonalized nature of much technical writing allows an author to disappear, avoiding responsibility for shoddy

scholarship, weak documentation, or distorted content. Personal writing must answer for itself, and writers aware of themselves are inevitably more conscious of their integrity.

### Notes

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<sup>2</sup>In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic books, 1983), 147-63.